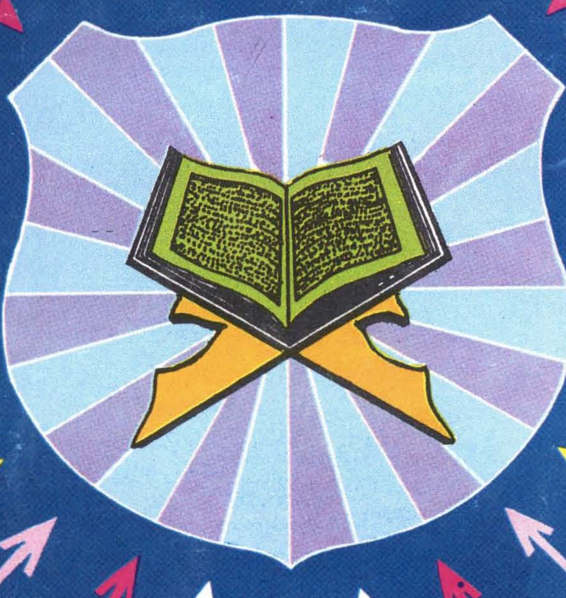
The Sublime Quran and Orientalism



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The Sublime Qur'ān and Orientalism

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحیم

PUBLISHERS NOTE

The author Dr. Mohammad Khalifa is a renowned scholar of Cairo (Egypt). He got his Doctorate in Electrical Engineering at Toronto University, Canada. His distinguished career earned him the Fellowship of the British Institution of Electrical Engineers. Now he is also a Fellow of the American Institute of Electrical & Electronics Engineers.

During his stay at Canada, he came across the Western Intelligentsia and was shocked to find its misgivings and misunderstanding about Islam, Quran and The Holy Prophet (S.A.W.). He found most of the so-called scholars – orientalists deliberately misrepresenting Islam and its Teachings. Hence, to dispel their misgivings, and wrong notions about Islam and Quran, he decided to write a book. After Ten Year's Hard work and Research, he wrote. "The Subline Qur'an and Orientalism'.

This is a book which Every Muslim and Every Non-Muslim searching for the truth should study. It presents the picture of Islam in its true colours and presents the truth in its true form. The First Edition of this book was published by Longman Group Ltd., London, New York. The book was not available in the market since long. Now the worthy author has allowed us to publsih the book. Now we have published this Cheap Edition as Paper Back, for its wide circulation in the masses. We hope, our brothers will cooperate with us for the mass circulation of this valuable Book.

AKHLAQ HUSAIN

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Preface

This book is written with the lofty ambition of providing a meaningful introduction to the Qur'ān for Western readers. It may be argued that the Qur'ān, the sacred Book for the 900 million or so of today's Muslims, is already well known to non-Muslims, particularly in the West where food for thought is so abundant through a wealth of reading material, and more specifically among English-speaking peoples who are usually brought up with the love of reading and the search for factual information about other societies.

More information about Muslims in general has become available in recent years since the rush of political, economic and social events in various Muslim countries have sometimes claimed more than their fair share of news headlines in Western newspapers, radio broadcasts and on the occasional television feature. However, when asked "What do you know about the Qur'ān?" the average Western reader might answer, "Not much more than the fact that it is the sacred book of Muslims" (often misnamed "Mohammedans"). He may venture to add a conjecture that the Book is a collection of Muḥammad's sayings similar to those attributed to Confucius, a history of Muḥammad, as a paraphrase of the Bible, or a volume of Islamic law. How far from the truth these conjectures are will be explained in this work.

During the years the author spent in Canada carrying out research in one of the specialized fields of electrical engineering he was privileged to have had the opportunity of lively discussions with colleagues and friends who showered him with questions on the various subjects of Islam, the Qur'ān, comparative religions and ideologies. These discussions went on during coffee breaks as well as during the talks in gatherings kindly arranged by responsible members of churches and different societies.

Apart from individual exceptions, the common rule which prevailed was the existence of fundamental misconceptions about Islam and the Qur'ān, combined with a keen interest in learning the truth through quiet, open-minded discussions without dogma-

tic fanaticism or jumping to conclusions. To understand their feelings towards Islam and to appreciate their approach to the subject the author studied every available book published for Western scholars and writers on Islam and more particularly on the Qur'ān. In the course of the last two decades the author has examined a vast collection of references with the result that an integrated picture of Western views on Islam, and especially the Qur'ān, has eventually taken shape with various shades of meaning and manifold details brought into focus.

So many books and articles have been written in the West about Islam by authors of diverse backgrounds — Muslims, Christians, Jews and even self-confessed atheists and Marxists — that the present writer feels that the whole spectrum of opinion on the subject is already available in English literature. Printing presses are always turning out new books on Islam as perceived from various angles, arousing considerable interest among readers who want to know more about the religious, religio-political and religio-economic backgrounds of the people who own the sources of "black gold" in the frequently turbulent areas of the Middle East.

This work is in no way intended as a competitor to books of general interest on the subject nor is it aimed as an elaborate study of Islam as a faith or as a way of life. It is first and foremost focussed on the Qur'ān. There is obviously a great difference between an essay on the Qur'ān proper and a general survey of an Islamic subject. For although the Qur'ān may be briefly described in an essay on Islam, some of its passages quoted, the topics it deals with in relation to Muḥammad and to Muslims as a whole summarized, there would be no room for more. While the main subject under discussion may be legislation, the history of a certain period or dynasty, the life of a contemporary or ancient community or otherwise, the approach to the Qur'ān — the revealed basis of the Islamic faith and way of life — is bound to be different.

Looking through the vast literature on the subject in English one finds works falling into two main categories: these comprise either translations of the sacred Book or treatises by scholarly Orientalists elaborating on one specific aspect or the other. The translations, the author considers, are usually addressed to readers already familiar with the Book and its historical, religious and literary backgrounds; whereas the latter tend to deal with the

Qur'ānic style, exegesis, or legislation. More often than not these are submitted to the limited circle of researchers into Oriental and Islamic studies by one of their number with the purpose of showing how and why his views would be more likely to support than to contradict those of earlier investigators into his isolated point of research. One such esoteric point of study centred on whether the roots of Qur'ānic exegesis were halakhic or haggadic in origin, or were they neither?

There is evidently an urgent need for a panoramic view of the numerous aspects and side issues related to the Qur'ān proper — and one obtainable in a concise volume which can be read by non-specialists; a book which answers the principal questions hovering at the back of the Western reader's mind about the Qur'ān without being or sounding too esoteric.

Is the Qur'ān comparable to the Bible — either in its entirety or to a specific part such as the four Gospels? Is it comparable to the Old or New Testament? And if so, in what way? Are there several versions of the Qur'ān in its original Arabic? If so, how many? What is the Qur'ānic concept of God and what does it have to say about Christ? Does it at all refer to the biblical prophets and if so how does it narrate their lives?

Books of old which have been held sacred by some Oriental societies are known to have been composed by exponents of religious thought, philosophy and saintly behaviour who may have lived in centuries far apart from each other. Such books would naturally have taken a long time to crystallize into the shapes we have now. How does the Qur'ān compare with these — if there is any point of comparison?

In the course of the last ten years or more the world seems to have shrunk dramatically in contrast to what it was, say, at the turn of the century. Distances which used to be travelled in weeks by sea can now be flown across in hours by supersonic airliners. Events taking place in other continents, or even on other planets can now be watched on television via a network of satellites, as they occur. Similarly, the multiple ties of interdependence between the industrialized West and the Muslim states, where the gushing oil has provided a stupendous increase in revenue combined with the craving for development and the impelling desire for modernization, have brought these countries much closer together. Consequently, the common reader in the United King-

dom and North America has recently become much more aware of Islam with multiplied interest in learning about its followers, how to cope with them, and what to expect.

The social and personal behaviour of Muslim men, women and societies as they are encountered in the West could very well be different from the way it is depicted in films or fantasticized in novels, and sometimes even in textbooks. Two compelling questions arise here: whether there is a religious basis for the behaviour of people and how faithfully their patterns of living comply with it? Or is there a difference between Islam as represented by its conduct and norms as laid down in the Qur'ān for the different spheres of living? For instance, what has the Qur'ān to say on the subject of morals? Does it sanction the violence displayed by certain persons or groups? What status does it assign to women in society? If some states alter their civil codes and social norms, as has lately been seen in the public media, so as to comply with the Qur'ānic law (*Sharī'ah*), what should one expect? Will it be for better or for worse?

Of course, the best way to answer all these questions would be to study the Qur'ān in its Arabic original, the text of which has never been changed even to the slightest degree ever since its revelation fourteen centuries ago. But how many in the West know Arabic, and know it well enough for such an undertaking? The great majority of people interested in the Qur'ān, whatever their field of specialization may be, even those studying Islam or Oriental sciences other than classical Arabic, are bound to read the Book only in translation. It should be pointed out that by Classical Arabic we mean the pure language as it was before being perturbed by the mass of slang expressions which have sprung up like weeds in every Arab country. The author hastens to add that, despite the multitudes of colloquial idioms flung into circulation by successive Arab generations, the Classical language of the Qur'ān has remained crystal clear to the ear, mind and heart of every born Arab irrespective of his level of education, his nationality, profession or background.

More likely than not, the average English reader would pick up any one of the several translations now available. Most of these are short on explanatory notes, which are necessary to substantiate word-for-word translations. This method of rendering can do injustice to the original, and this above all applies to the Qur'ān. The extreme wealth of meanings carried by any Arabic word is most

often filtered through into one narrow, faint shade of meaning symbolized by the one corresponding English word chosen by the translator. The resulting picture could never render more than the barest impression of the extraordinary richness of ideas promulgated, emotions aroused and meanings expressed in the original Arabic. It becomes even fainter and more obscure when the English version is reached indirectly via French and/or Latin; there are many such translations popular in the West. So, what is the ordinary reader to do if he wants a reasonably well-balanced view of Islam as expressed in the Qur'ān? The Orientalists would rush to the forefront, with each Islamic specialist favouring his own pet theories. Not to be excluded from this group are those Marxists with a specialization in Islamic studies. How can they ever appreciate the subject of any religion if their indoctrination is based on the notion that religion is the opium of the people? Perhaps they overlook the fact that many of their own intellectuals can not at heart swallow their indoctrination, and have to seek relief in religion even if it means practising it clandestinely. When such self-confessed atheists as these write on religious themes they cannot possibly have any genuine understanding of the subject; they are either hypocrites or suffering from schizophrenia.

It would be valuable for the ordinary reader, besides reading a good translation of the Qur'ān, to have available a range of the salient comments made about it by the groups of Orientalists of various backgrounds, both ancient and modern. There are those who specialize in Arabic and those who do not; the ones who actually studied the original text and those who depended solely on translations or copied second-hand ideas long since disproved.

This task, however, would entail insurmountable difficulties. No-one would undertake it but those scholars willing to spend years of serious intensive study and who would probably aim at some high degree in Islamics. But the ordinary reader can afford neither time nor effort, and may be satisfied with an eagle's eye view of the salient comments, theories and criticisms raised by a large assembly of Orientalists, including those best known in recent history, as well as in the Middle Ages.

This topological survey was carried out by the author during the last ten years or more, and is presented in the coming chapters. The hundreds of books written in English since the early part of this century, as well as in the Middle Ages, have been used to

collect, summarize and analyse the comments on the Qur'ān. They have displayed a very wide spectrum of opinions embracing the two extreme views as exemplified on the one hand by the reference to the Qur'ān as a "wearisome confused jumble", and on the other by the description of the same book as "the inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy".

The views of these Orientalists are organized under various headings and assembled into two main groups, namely general comments and those focussing on specific subjects. Part I of this work provides general comments on the names of the Qur'ān, its authorship, style and subject matter, the chronological order of its *Sūrahs* (chapters) as compared to their sequence in the text, typical inaccuracies in certain English translations, some famous misconceptions and typical misinterpretations. Part II is devoted to elaborating on specific topics: the Qur'ānic concept of God, and of Islam, its code of morals, the status it assigns to women, its views on polygamy, divorce, *jihād* and slavery, its concepts of the metaphysical world, predestination and free will.

Throughout the book, the general description "Orientalist" will be used to mean scholars specializing in Islamic studies and writing about Islamic topics. It is more a convenient term than an accurate description. Many Qur'ānic quotations will be rendered. The works by Arberry, Pickthall, Ali, Khan and Sale will be used freely, sometimes with modifications by the author in order to aid clarity. Modern English is often preferred to the archaic for further refinement and transparence. However, as is the case with those who consider the English King James Bible finer than more modern translations, many Englishmen would argue that archaic English is far more beautiful for translating the Qur'ān; for instance, compare "behold" with "look", "thou" with "you" and "unto" with "to".

There are bound to be some variations among the English transliterations of Arabic words.* For example, we read "Qur'ān", "Quran" and "Koran". The first is phonetically nearest to the Arabic and therefore will be used here. Similarly, "Mohamed", "Mahomet", "Mohammad" and "Muḥammad" are to be found. The last is nearest to the Arabic sound.

In order to help specialists in this field, the important bibliogra-

*The transliteration of Arabic words is explained in Appendix 1.

phical references are given in a detailed list appended at the end of the book, and as notes where pertinent. The notes are as brief as possible in order to provide minimal distraction to the ordinary reader. The Qur'ānic verses are referenced by a bracketed pair of numbers, of which the former is the number of the *Sūrah* (chapter) and the latter that of the verse. Thus the fifth verse of the third *Sūrah* is (3:5).

The author fully realizes the shortcomings of this work — so ambitious in its aim. He is so much aware of the gaps in his knowledge that he could not enjoy the peace of mind shared by those who consider their accomplishments complete. His main excuse is that he has realized the great need for a comprehensive collection of information and views on the Islamic sacred book to be presented in one volume, to English speaking readers. If this work can help them formulate a more balanced impression and at the same time be of value for science in this field of study, no credit is claimed — the success is only through God's grace and with His great help.

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The author feels indebted to many people: to the Universities of Cairo and Riyadh for encouragement and making time available to him for this research while he was teaching electrical engineering; to the unfailing help given by staff of Cairo University Library and the equally helpful staff of the Public Libraries in London; to the authors of certain books referenced here who kindly sent complimentary copies; for the constructive criticism of colleagues, brothers and friends; and last but not least, to his late wife, whose selfless help in reviewing and typing the manuscript and searching through the literature has been the main contributor to his having finished this book in a finite number of years.

The author also gratefully acknowledges the extreme care, proficient advice and generous help he has received from the publishers, editors, typists and staff of the Arab World Department of Longman Group Ltd. during the various stages of revising and producing this book.

Part I

Introduction

The Qur'ān and Its Names

All the great religions of the world have their sacred books but it is the proud claim of Islam that the Qur'ān is the only sacred book to have survived absolutely unchanged since it was first revealed and written down fourteen hundred years ago.

Muslims believe the Qur'ān was revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad at intervals over a period of about twenty-three years, beginning in Mecca and continuing in Medina. It consists of 114 *Sūrahs* (chapters) comprising roughly 80,000 words.

The religion of Islam — Islam means submission to the Will of God — is based on the Qur'ān, which contains directions concerning almost every aspect of human life in this world and the next. Islam, therefore, is a way of life more than a mere belief. The Qur'ān contains references to other religions, notably Judaism and Christianity, and to the biblical prophets.

This is the briefest of outlines of the Qur'ān; the following chapters will elaborate on several of its aspects.

The Oxford Dictionary spells the name as "Koran" and defines it as the "sacred book of the Mohammedans*, the collection of Mohammed's oral revelations written in Arabic". The statement of the revelations being "of" or "to" Muḥammad will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. In the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*[1], the Qur'ān is described as "the sacred book of Islam on which the religion of more than seven hundred millions of Mohammedans is founded", being regarded by them as the true word of God. And since the use of the Qur'ān in public worship, in schools and otherwise is much more extensive than,

* Muslims categorically reject the adjective "Mohammedan" as a description of their religious group as it falsely implies that they are worshippers of Muḥammad rather than the One God. They nevertheless love Muḥammad, feel much indebted to him and frequently pray that peace be upon him.

for example, the reading of the Bible in most Christian countries, it has been truly described as the most widely read book in existence. This circumstance alone is sufficient to give it an urgent claim on our attention, whether it suits our taste and falls in with our religious and philosophical views or not.[1]

The language in which the revelation came down is Arabic and the word *Qur'ān* means "that which is often recited or read over and over again". The root of the word being *Qara'a*, the Arabic word meaning "he read" or "he recited"[2]. Thus the noun *Qur'ān* can signify "special reading or recitation" as mentioned in *Sūrah* 75 of the sacred Book itself. "*Fa-idha Qara'nāho fattabi' Qur'ānaho*" thus translates as "so when we read it follow its reading", or, "so when we recite it follow its recitation"[3]. According to Islamic tradition the very first words of revelation were (Sūrah. 96); "*Iqra'-bismi Rabbika-alladhi khalaq,*" which translates as "Read or recite in the Name of your Lord Who created". Therefore, the literal connotation of the Qur'ān or *al-Qur'ān*★ can be, "the book that is often read" — referring only to the sacred Book of the Muslims.

If we go through the literature over the years related to the Qur'ān or Islam we will find that the oldest publication is in fact the hallowed Book itself, referring to itself as the Qur'ān on many occasions. We find, for instance:

> Surely this Qur'ān guides to that which is most upright and gives good news to the believers who do good that theirs is a great reward. (17:9)

The name, therefore, was given to the Book by God, the source of revelation.

The Book has numerous titles and names. In Arabic it is seldom mentioned without the addition of such exalted appellations as:
"*Al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*" (The Bounteous, Noble or Honourable);
"*Al-Qur'ān al-Hakīm*" (The Full of Wisdom);
"*Al-Qur'ān al-Majīd*" (The Glorious);
"*Al-Qur'ān al-'Aḍhīm*" (The Great or Sublime).
There is also "*Al-Qur'ān dhidh-dhikr*", which is variously translated as "possessing eminence" or "containing remembrance" or, more vaguely by Sale as "full of admonition," while Rodwell sees it as "full of warning".

However, each of these translations can convey only a shade of

★ *al* is the Arabic article "the".

the true, rich meaning of the Arabic original. For, as Kritzeck has put it[4], "No translation can convey more than the barest suggestion of what is in the Qur'an that can move men to tears and ecstasy." Although some non-Arabic speaking Muslims describe the Book as "The Holy Qur'ān" the corresponding Arabic adjective *muqaddas* is actually never used for the simple reason that the holiness of the Book is too deeply implied and understood to need mentioning. Sometimes we find the Qur'ān referred to as "*Kitāb-Allāh*" ("The Book of God"); or "*Kalām-Allāh*", ("The Words of God"); or "*Nōron wa Kitabom-Mubīn*", interpreted by M. 'Ali as "Light and Clear Book", and by Arberry[5] as "Light and Manifest Book".

Other exalted names for it are: "*Al-Dhikr-ul-Hakīm*" ("Remembrance which is full of Wisdom"), and "*Dhikrom-Mubārakon*" ("Blessed Remembrance"); or "*Dhikrul-Lil'ā lamīn*" ("A Reminder for all beings"); or "*Al-Sirāt-al-Mustaqīm*" ("The Straight Path").

It is interesting to observe the various translations for its title "*Al Furqan*", which Arberry[6] interprets as "the Salvation", and M.'Ali as "the Discriminator", while Pickthall sees it as "the Criterion for Right and Wrong", and Sale as "the Distinction between Good and Evil", and Rodwell as "the Illuminator". An Arabic scholar[7] who is one of the authorities on the subject has counted no less than fifty-five names and titles for the Qur'ān.

The work was described by the Prophet Muhammad, as quoted by 'Ali-ibn-'Abi-Ṭālib[8], as follows: "The Book of God. In it is the record of what was before you, the judgement of what is among you, and the prophecies of what will come after you. It is the decisive; not a case for levity. Whoever is a tyrant and ignores the Qur'ān will be destroyed by God.

"Whoever seeks guidance from other than it will be misguided. The Qur'ān is the unbreakable bond of connection with God; it is the remembrance full of wisdom and the straight path. The Qur'ān does not become distorted by tongues, nor can it be deviated by caprices; it never dulls from repeated study; scholars will always want more of it. The wonders of the Qur'ān are never-ending. Whoever speaks from it will speak the truth, whoever rules with it will be just and whoever holds fast to it will be guided to the straight path."

Any copy of the Qur'ān is referred to in Arabic as "*al-Muṣ-ḥaf*", that is to say the collection of pages. This name was used for the

first time about three decades after the Prophet's death, when the Qur'ān was originally compiled into one volume. In those early years no other book was generally known to the Arab nation who were mostly illiterate.

Some Orientalists have airily assumed that the word *Qur'ān* was not Arabic at all but derived from a Syriac word denoting "Scripture lesson". Such a far-fetched assumption sounds faint in contrast to the straightforward conclusion that the word is actually an Arabic one deriving from the same root as *Qara'a* ("he read"). This conclusion happens to be corroborated by the Holy Book itself in the verse rendered.

> A Qur'ān made distinct so that you may read it to the people. (17:106)

The truth is that the Arabic language has its roots deep in history and has not undergone such significant changes down the generations as compared with other languages. One outstanding reason for this almost stabilized state of Arabic is the Qur'ān itself, and the fact that ever since it was first revealed Muslims of all races and tongues have wanted to learn its noble language as a labour of love — for Allāh and His Message. The difference between the Qur'ānic Arabic and that of today, after the passage of fourteen centuries, is insignificant when compared with the difference, say, between the English of Shakespeare's time and modern English usage.

This pure quality of Arabic has enabled it to be used as a basis for reference when studying other semitic languages such as Syriac, Aramaic and Hebrew, which have all undergone drastic changes down the centuries. Indeed, Arnold and Guillaume have declared that Hebrew words and idioms whose precise sense has been lost in the intricacies of Jewish tradition, "receive a ready and convincing explanation from cognate Arabic sources"[9].

Chapter 1

The Authorship of the Qur'ān

This is one of the most controversial points about the sacred Book. Muslims are of the firm belief that it was God's composition, word by word and even letter by letter; the divine revelation coming down through the mission of the Archangel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad in instalments. Immediately after each revelation the Prophet repeated the heavenly words aloud to his followers around him and to his scribes who wrote them down.

Yet, on the other hand, non-Muslims find it hard to accept that any book whatever exists or ever existed which was actually composed by God. Books held sacred by non-Muslims have been written by men who were saintly and held in great spiritual esteem, but who nonetheless were mortals. This applies to the Old and New Testaments as well as to books of other faiths.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE GOSPELS

According to Christian doctrines[1], "each of the four Gospels was written by a human free agent who preserved his own style and his own ideas as well as his own method of historiography, though under the guidance of the Holy Spirit." Any discrepancies among their scriptures were explained by the theory of "colouring by the medium", adopted by the Christian theologians[2]. Such

a theory is, of course, absolutely unknown to Muslims since there is no necessity for it with the Qur'ān. Further, the four Gospels are available only in translation, the originals being lost, and hence the imperfection in the form of the Scriptures is admitted in Christianity.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE PENTATEUCH

The Old Testament was the product of Jewish writers of the period dating from around a thousand years before the Christian era.[3]

During the tenth century BC the Yahvist text of the Pentateuch was written by prophets of the Second Kingdom, Judah[4]. This was to form the backbone of the first five books ascribed to Moses. About two centuries later, the Elohist text, of the Northern Kingdom, was to be added to constitute a single book, the Torah. The book of Deuteronomy was added at that time. In the sixth century BC and after the death of Ezekiel, his book was written by his disciples who also wrote the third text of Genesis, "Sacerdotal", which was inserted into the fabric of the Yahvist and Elohist texts[5].

Among the other books of the Old Testament, Proverbs was written around 480 BC, Job about 450 BC, Ecclesiastes, or Koheleth, dates from the third century BC, as do the Song of Songs, Chronicles I and II, Ezra and Nehemiah. Ecclesiasticus or Sirah appeared in the second century BC. For many, the Old Testament did not become definitive until one century after Christ's lifetime.[6]

BOOKS HELD SACRED BY OTHER RELIGIONS

For Hindus the religious writings are innumerable. Besides the Vedas (the hymns), and Upanishads (doctrines), come vast collections called Epics, and Puranas (ancient tales). These have been

more influential on the masses than the Vedas. The two great Epics are the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, both probably compiled during the first two centuries after Christ's birth. The Ramayana, a favourite Hindu classic, describes the adventures of the Prince Rama; countless Hindus repeat a few lines of it daily. The Mahabharata is an extremely long poem full of legend, myth and morality.

Although the Vedas are believed by Hindus to have been revealed by the Gods to the ancient seers, there seems to be no clear-cut evidence supported with names and dates as in the case of the Qur'ān. In fact, the Ramayana is known to have been composed in Sanskrit by the poet Valmiki.[7]

The Buddhist religious texts include the four canonical books "Nikayas", in which sayings of the Buddha were collected by his disciples about fifty years after his death in the sixth century BC.[8] Other sayings, most of them ascribed not to the Buddha but to his disciples, were also put together into a supplementary Nikaya. Centuries later these Nikayas were further supplemented by religious, philosophical and historical novels, poems and epics. One of the best known Nikayas is the Milinda which purports to give the discussion between the Greek king Menander and the Buddhist elder Nagasena. Thus, it is quite evident that the authors of the Buddhist sacred texts were human rather than divine.

The book *Analects* was written partly by Confucius (551–479 BC), the rest by his disciples. It has been accepted by his followers as a code of morality rather than a book of religion.[9] Although Confucius was venerated in olden times and sacrifices were instituted for him in Chinese schools, more reflective ages subsequently maintained that he should not be worshipped and in the halls of Confucians his images were replaced by tablets. In present day China the sayings of Confucius are actually condemned as reactionary.

It is a mere axiom that the books by Marx and Mao-tse-Tung are never claimed to be divine. The simple reason is that such books are recognized and highly esteemed by Communists who categorically deny the existence of God according to their "scientific atheism".[10]

Orientalists' claims about the authorship of the Qur'ān

From the above it is evident that Islam is the sole religion whose followers firmly believe their sacred book to have been composed by God. This, however, has been persistently denied by non-Muslim writers down the years who claim categorically that the Qur'ān was composed by Muhammad with or without the help of others. Some of these writers' statements are extremely sweeping and moreover make little or no attempt to give supporting evidence. Sale, for instance, in his *Preliminary Discourse*, first published in the eighteenth century, declared: "That Muḥammad was really the author and chief contriver of the Qur'ān is beyond dispute; though it be highly probable that he had no small assistance in his design from others."[11]

Sir William Muir in the last century, Wollaston in 1905, Lammens in 1926, Champion and Short in 1959, Glubb 1970 and Rodinson as late as 1977[12] merely reiterated this logically unfounded assumption. We find the echoing statements of other Orientalists: from Menezes, "nothing else but a pure creation and concoction of Mohammed and of his accomplice"; and from Draycott, "Through it all runs the fire of his genius; in the later Sūrahs (chapters) it is the reflection of his energy that looks out from the pages."[13]

Many Orientalists have claimed the Prophet to be a poet, a thinker, an epileptic or bewitched, or to have relied on Jewish and Christian sources in composing the Book. A few writers in the Middle Ages even came out with the fantastic assertion that it was put together by Christians or Jews especially employed for the purpose, patching it up with bits of the Bible in order to satisfy popular demand![14] Of course, this particular medieval assertion was subsequently proved to be untrue and accordingly dropped when some accurate information became available in the West.

As a matter of fact, most of these notions are not exclusively the Orientalists' inventions, being promulgated originally by tribal chiefs among the disbelievers in the Prophet's own time. Naturally, such antagonistic contemporaries were prepared to use any means to discredit his prophethood, discerning in it a cardinal threat to their supremacy as leaders of the community. Their

assertions and accusations against the Prophet have come down to us in the vivid terms of the Qur'ān:

> When it was said to them: There is no god save Allāh, they were scornful and said: Shall we forsake our gods for a mad poet? Nay, but he brought the Truth and he confirmed the messengers before him. (52: 29–34)

> And when our revelations are recited unto them they say: We have heard, if we wished we could say the like of it, this is nothing but fables of the ancients. (8:31)

Is it not strange to note how when modern Orientalists echo these accusations made fourteen centuries ago, they merely phrase them anew?

CLAIMS THAT THE PROPHET WAS A POET

This claim was put forward by Stobart about a hundred years ago, was reiterated by Bell in the 1920s, and was echoed much more recently by Rodinson[15]. After reading the Qur'ān in translation, Stobart asserted that it could have been written by any Arab who is "acquainted with the general outline of the Jewish history and of the traditions of his own country and possessed of some poetic fire and fancy". Bell differed slightly when he described the Prophet as a poet, "but not of the ordinary Arab type," because his themes of religion and righteousness were hardly touched by other poets. Rodinson could not appreciate the Qur'ān except as a poem stored up in Muhammad's unconscious mind.

Readers familiar with Arabic poetry realize that it has long been distinguished by its *wazn, baḥr, 'arūḍ* and *qāfiyah* — exact measures of syllabic sounds and rhymes, which have to be strictly adhered to even at the expense of grammar and shades of meaning at times. All this is categorically different from the Qur'ānic literary style.

CLAIMS THAT THE QUR'ĀN RESULTED FROM HIS IMAGINATION

In the 1960s Anderson and Watt came up independently with almost the same theory. Anderson described the Qur'ān as "the result of wishful thinking"[16], assuming that words, thoughts and stories which various external or internal stimuli summoned from the Prophet's subconscious mind came to constitute the Qur'ān. Watt, applying modern methods of literary analysis, came to the conclusion that he may have been mistaken in believing the Qur'ān to be a divine message: "What seems to a man to come from outside himself may actually come from his unconscious."[17] Hence he described the Book as "the product of creative imagination".

But this theory of Anderson and Watt collapses under the weight of the mere fact that no other "imagination" — no matter how "creative" — has ever been able to produce a similar masterpiece or indeed even a part of it.

The contents of the Qur'ān and its miraculous nature will be discussed in the following chapters. It may just be mentioned here that this theory of Anderson and Watt is furthermore unoriginal, since it was also referred to in the Qur'ān as one of the claims put forward against the Prophet by the disbelievers who used the term, "muddled dreams" instead of "imagination" (21:5).

CLAIMS THAT HE WAS AN EPILEPTIC

San Pedro and other Orientalists of the Middle Ages and later have asserted that the Prophet was an epileptic or possessed by demons, in an attempt to explain the divine revelations.[18] Much more recently Rodinson dubbed it as auditory visual hallucination.[19] But this baseless claim has been ruled out by objective and rational writers. Daniel, for example, commented that "epilepsy as applied to the Prophet was the explanation of those who sought to amuse rather than to instruct"[20].

The question may well be asked: Has epilepsy — this sad and debilitating disease — ever enabled its victim to become a prophet or a law-giver, or rise to a position of the highest esteem and power?[21]

How could it, when such a disease is scientifically known to lead eventually to mental deterioration in the form of defective memory, diminishing intelligence or irregularities of temper? On the physical side, as is well known, the effects of the epileptic attacks are often shattering on both sufferer and spectator. There have been no signs of this in any of the details of the Prophet's life which have come down to us through the centuries. "On the contrary, he was clearly in full possession of his faculties to the very end of his life."[22] Moreover, Muhammad was a man whose common sense never failed him — nor his physical strength. Had he ever collapsed under the strain of battle or controversy or fainted away when strong action was called for, a case for epilepsy might have been made out. As it is, "to base such a theory of epilepsy on a legend which on the face of it has no historical foundation is a sin against historical criticism".[23]

CLAIMS THAT HE COMPOSED THE QUR'ĀN HELPED BY JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN SOURCES

We come now to an oft-repeated charge, namely that the Prophet composed the Qur'ān either with direct help from others, after reading books (despite the constantly reiterated fact of his illiteracy), or after being taught by someone of Jewish or Christian background. Like those other charges previously mentioned, these particular ones were again reiterated in the Middle Ages as well as more recently. Once more, it has to be pointed out that far from being original to this period these assertions were actually levelled by infidels in the lifetime of Muḥammad as reported in the Qur'ān itself in which they are challenged, (10:38; 11:13; 16:103).

The Prophet was assumed to have been instructed on Christianity and Judaism either during his travels or while staying in Mecca or Medina. He did travel to Syria twice, when aged thirteen and twenty-five, but this was long before his mission and consequently constitutes no justification for Bodley and others[24], to describe him as "a man who spent most of his time on the road"; nor for "his vast travels" to have been described as a major source of his accumulated knowledge[25]. Dry Arab history, according to Sale, records that Muḥammad's first journey to Syria was made at the

age of thirteen, with his uncle Abu-Tālib. They had a brief meeting with a certain monk called either Sergius[26] or Boḥaira[27]. Not only was this encounter too brief but it occurred too early to favour the surmise of the monk's assistance with the revelations, which began about thirty years later.

A further postulate was that Muḥammad had a close acquaintance with Christianity while in Mecca through what he might have heard from bishops and monks. These men, stationed as they were on the Syrian borders of the Arabian desert could have conducted missionary activities in the vicinity. Both Bodley and Gibb[28] have referred to bishops who used to preach Christianity from camelback during the fairs held annually at Oqāḍh near Mecca, naming Qiss-ben-Sā'idah as one of them. While it is historically correct that Qiss-ben-Sā'idah and another bishop called Assad-ben-Ka'b did deliver many sermons to the Arabs during these fairs, the unfortunate fact regarding the theory of their influencing the Prophet is that both bishops died over a century before Muḥammad's birth.[29]

In addition to the bishops and monks, two Christian swordsmiths were alleged to have taught Muḥammad — both by his disbelieving contemporaries and much more recently by Zwemer at the turn of the present century.[30] Jaber and Yasser were Abyssinian slaves who had accepted Islam; their master, a member of the Bani-Ḥaḍramy, used to beat them saying, "You are teaching Muḥammad!" They would protest, "No, by Allāh! He teaches us and guides us!".[31] It seems that Zwemer favoured their master's opinion.

Meanwhile Menezes, and Gardner[32], postulated a completely different teacher for the Prophet. They maintained that Salmān, a Persian, had helped in writing the sacred Book. This Salmān, who had been a Zoroastrian before accepting Christianity in Syria, later moved on to Medina where he met the Prophet and embraced Islam. Salmān's life is documented in Islamic history, notably as the very first person to propose digging a trench for the defence of Medina when the city was threatened with invasion by the Meccan disbelievers and their allies. His bright suggestion, coupled with violent wintry gales, successfully repelled the enemy.

It is well known to Muslims that the greater part of the Qur'ān, i.e., about two thirds of it, was revealed in Mecca before the Prophet migrated to Medina, where Salmān met him. Furthermore, the Book's literary style is so sublime that even born Arab lin-

guists who have tried over the years to imitate it have not been successful — to say nothing of a Persian.

Sometimes Muḥammad was simply accused of learning from an unnamed teacher[33], the charge being levelled in general terms such as "The long rambling accounts of Jewish patriarchs and prophets [in the Qur'ān] correspond in so much detail with the Talmud that of their essentially Jewish origin there can be no doubt."[34] More recently Rodinson, following the same trail, naively alleged that Muḥammad merely arabized Judaeo-Christianity on the basis that it had already attracted his countrymen because of its association with higher civilizations.[35]

But against these assertions Bell wrote, "Of any intimate knowledge for the Prophet of either these two religions or the Bible itself there is no convincing evidence. The Surah 'Al-Ikhlaṣ' of the Qur'ān is sometimes quoted as an early rejection of one of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity."[36] Bell's theory was recently corroborated by the striking contrast between the Qur'ān and the Bible as shown by Bucaille in his treatise, *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science.*

As it is, the drastic difference between the Qur'ānic and biblical concepts of God, the contrasts between the biblical legends and the Qur'ānic records, not to mention the extremely unfriendly attitude of the Jewish community of Medina towards the Prophet must surely furnish convincing evidence against the conjecture that Jews or Christians helped him. Further objective proofs were provided by Bucaille.

Less recently, it was argued[37] that by the application of the principle of higher criticism it became clear that, "Muḥammad had been gathering, recasting and revising in written form the material planned to issue as his book."[38] In making these claims it should be pointed out that the writers concerned have overlooked certain important facts. Ibn-Taymiyah, who wrote a book on the same subject in the Middle Ages, stated among other things that the Prophet was illiterate. Secondly, he argued that the sublime style of the Qur'ān remained the same throughout the entire period of its revelation. No mortal author could maintain such perfection of style, persistently, for so long. Not a *Sūrah*, not a verse, not even a word was revised, as is recorded in history.

Thirdly, the Arabs of those generations excelled in accurate memorizing of their history. The records of events used to be relayed by word of mouth verbatim from one historian to another

down the generations. The science of *Isnād* relating to this subject was developed by the Arabs long before the art of printing appeared upon the scene. This science includes the grading of historians according to their knowledge, upbringing, way of life, the kind of friends they used to have and their accuracy in recording events. *Isnād* also discusses the way the same events are reported by various channels or chains of narrators and accounts for any discrepancies.

With the safeguard of the science of *Isnād*, as it flourished in Arabia, not one Arab historian was quoted to have mentioned that Muhammad ever sat down to learn from anyone; nor that he used regularly to counsel with friends except after he became a Prophet. Arab history records every detail of Muḥammad's life from his birth to the moment of his death.

Finally, Ibn-Taymiyah makes the point that Muḥammad, before reaching the age of forty, never preached, nor could he utter a passage of the Qur'ān which is clearly distinct even from his own speeches and sayings.

Had Muḥammad in fact learnt from a Christian monk, a bishop, a Jewish person, or even from Christian slaves, the following might have happened:

1. Muḥammad would never have denied it because he was famous all his life for both preaching and telling the truth.
2. He could never have preached a faith so radically different from Christianity and Judaism, particularly with respect to their basic creeds.
3. Under the circumstances, and considering the climate of antagonism existing between him and those who did not believe in his message, particularly the Jews and polytheists, his teacher's name could scarcely have remained unknown throughout all the years of the Prophet's mission.
4. Whoever taught him would surely have written a book or at least a chapter similar to the Qur'ānic revelations.
5. The Jews, referred to in the Qur'ān as "The people of the Book" had been persistently cross-examining him, defying him and hiding their books from others. How then could they have taught him at the same time? If they had taught him anything would they not have been the first to declare it in order to disprove his prophethood? It is difficult to believe that they would not also have been careful to suppress

the uncomplimentary references to them contained in the Qur'ān.

6. Had Muḥammad not been sincere in his prophethood and honest in delivering his revelations his friends and followers would never have been so devoted to him, nor would they have clung to his teachings despite devastating hardship and persecution. It is a remarkable tribute to the character of Muḥammad and to those of his friends and followers that not one of them ever betrayed him.
7. The Qur'ān confirms certain biblical records of previous prophets. Since the historical events in the Bible were originally revealed by God to Moses and other prophets why could not this confirmation be a sign that the source is one, and divine?
8. If divine authorship has never been claimed for the Bible by a Christian why should Muḥammad have risked additional persecution from his enemies by claiming the Qur'ān to have been revealed by God if this were not so?

In conclusion of this discussion it may be appropriate to reflect on the Qur'ānic verses relevant to the subject of its authorship:

> Say: the Holy Spirit has revealed it from your Lord with truth that it may confirm those who believe and as guidance and good tidings for those who have surrendered (to God).
> And we know well that they say: Only a man teaches him. The speech of him at whom they falsely hint is outlandish and this is manifest Arabic speech.
> Lo! Those who disbelieve the Revelations of Allāh, Allāh guides them not and theirs will be a painful doom.
> Only they invent falsehood who believe not Allāh's Revelations and (only) they are the liars. (**16**: 102–105)

Chapter 2

The Divine Composition of the Qur'ān

In no sense is it scientific to put forward an assertion such as "that the Qur'ān was really the work of the Prophet of Arabia is beyond dispute"[1], without even trying to support it with any logical argument.

Yet, is there any logical argument to support the Muslim claim that the Qur'ān was revealed to Muḥammad and transmitted by him without changing a single word?

Yes, there are two main arguments for this. Firstly, the Arabic literary style as evidenced in the sacred Book is exalted above any other work — including Muḥammad's own speeches and sayings. Secondly, the subject matter, covering as it does such an infinite range of ideas and touching on topics then unknown to mortal mind, could never have been conceived either by Muḥammad or by any of his contemporaries. Let us look at these two points in detail.

The Qur'ānic literary style

It is distinguished clearly from all other Arabic works whether they be poetry, rythmic or non-rythmic prose, the spoken or written language of ordinary people or even that of the Prophet

himself. The exceptional eloquence of Muhammad has always been acknowledged and is known to us in thousands of his sayings and instructions. However, none of these bears the slightest resemblance to the revealed messages, the transcendent power of which impregnates the soul with quickening light. Even the infidels of the Prophet's time acknowledged the substantive inimitability of the Qur'ān and considered the form of the text such an extraordinary phenomenon that they used to call it "magic".

The Qur'ānic style can naturally best be appreciated by Arabs, especially by those of its contemporaries who had greatly perfected their literary arts and were so fond of poetry that they used to put up the most excellent poems on the door of the Ka'bah in Mecca, which to them was the most sacred shrine. Two instances will show how much they admired the Qur'ān for its concinnity. A poem by Labīb-ibn-Rabī'ah, one of the greatest masterpieces of Arabic in Muḥammad's time, was fixed up on the door of the Ka'bah. None of the other poets dared offer anything in competition. But part of a Qur'ānic *Sūrah* was fixed next to it. Soon after, Labīb himself, then an idolator, on reading the first few verses only, was struck with admiration and immediately professed the religion taught therein, declaring that such words could only be divinely inspired.[2]

The other instance records 'Omar's acceptance of Islam. 'Omar-ibnel-Khaṭṭāb was a linguist of no mean standing.[3] As a member of the leading group of idolators in their campaign against Muḥammad, 'Omar was taunted when his own sister accepted Islam against his will and even without his knowing. At once, he rushed, sword in hand, to his sister's house. Finding her holding a sheet of paper he demanded it be handed over to him. Then an extraordinary thing happened. This man who had been famous for his violence and severity suddenly changed. For the strength and beauty of the few verses he read so filled his heart with awe, he felt a compulsion to go straight to the Prophet and profess the faith[4]. Subsequently, 'Omar-ibnel-Khaṭṭāb became one of the pillars of the Muslim community, as recorded in Islamic history.

As previously mentioned, Muḥammad's contemporary disbelievers insistently dubbed the Qur'ān as "magic" and tried to discourage each other from listening to it lest it might charm them away from their traditional polytheism. But none of them denied its concinnity, excellence and transcendence.

Considerably later in time there appeared on the scene some

linguists who knew very much less about Arabic simply because it was not their language, nor had they studied it well enough. Despite this, they set themselves up as critics, indulging in sweeping judgements on the Qur'ānic style. Certain of these Orientalists have described the sacred Book as having "many literary defects"; filled with "obscure sentences and strange words"; "numerous contradictions" and even "faults of grammar and style which it would have been so easy to rectify". Its text was also dubbed as "of perplexed state"; "a wearisome jumble, crude and incondite"; its "very words were inherently and perniciously defective".[5]

Other Orientalists were bewildered by the Qur'ānic rhymes, refrains and strophes. Delicate changes in the rhymes which actually contribute to its concinnity were misinterpreted, leading to the mistaken conclusion that the verses were "wrongly assembled, interrupted or detached".[6]

A recent Orientalist also asserted that the Qur'ānic style was "mechanically repetitious, of limited lexical range, filled with clumsy syntax, unjustifiable pleonasm and rhetoric embellishment in many parts and with ellipsis and hysteron proteron in many others".[7] Still more recently, a cursory claim was put forward that nothing exceptional exists about the Qur'ānic style: the enchantment to its listeners or readers was naively accounted for as a "mesmeric effect after years of mechanical repetition, developing on those brought up in the faith".[8] The same writer could see nothing different in the Qur'ān, he even assumed it to be identical to messages of *kahins* without quoting any to support his claim.[9] How could he then account for the millions who accepted Islam after one careful reflection on the Qur'ān? How could he explain the adoption of the faith by the early Muslims who were most sensitive to its literary style, and by the modern scientists who studied it only in translation?

Keeping these claims in mind it is worth indicating some of the differences which exist between the Arabic and English languages. The construction of the Arabic sentence is different in many ways from the English sentence and therefore may well appear clumsy if it is translated word for word. Second, it is by virtue of repetition — to non-Arabic speakers an excessive redundancy of verbal expression — that the vitally important truths are brought home. It would not, could not, be so powerful if these were stated with less emphasis or expansion. Third, a divine message designed to

win faith from atheism, benevolence from corruption and belief from unbelief could scarcely evade rhetorics. Fourth, to anyone who knows the Arabic language well the meaning of the words is perfectly clear for the most part, while there exists a vast amount of material written by Muslim scholars to explain those relatively few points which are puzzling to some. Finally, the inversion of natural order is surely a divine prerogative. As for the criticism levelled against the "limited lexical range", this above all demonstrates this particular Orientalist's lack of linguistic understanding since the amazing range of language contained in the Sacred Book conveys to the Arabic speaker the inimitable beauty and grace of its composition. It is as if a young boy whose knowledge of diamonds was limited to viewing them in a jeweller's window, were then to set himself up as an authority on discerning the delicate variations between different stones.

Al-Baqillāny, an eminent Arabic linguist of the Middle Ages, in his work "Miracle of the Qur'ān", stated that no one could appreciate its miracle like the well-versed Arabic linguists. It is interesting to note how As-Sayouty, in his treatise on the subject, has classified the related sciences and arts under approximately 300 headings.[10] This will be discussed in some detail in the next chapter. But one can only understand the frustration of someone who struggles through the Qur'ān with a limited knowledge of Arabic and then describes it as "literary chaos filled with clumsy syntax," or dub its words "inherently and perniciously defective".[11] One must master any language in order to appreciate its literary beauties.

Among the styles of elegance in Arabic prose and poetry is the repetition of a clause or a short sentence a few times in the passage to repeatedly remind the reader as he reads through of the important information it carries. Such a repetition, when masterfully designed, should sound like a sweet melody that recurs at the appropriate moments during a symphony. It may, alas, sound like a "mechanical repetition" to those who miss the point or have no taste for the music.

Another feature of graceful Arabic writing is the practice of bringing forward part of the sentence in order to give it extra emphasis — take for example the sentence "In God we trust" instead of "we trust God." The meanings are not quite the same. The former mode of expression no doubt emphasizes that our

trust in God is far stronger than ours in anyone else. This method of expression was not appreciated by some Orientalists who dismissed it as "hysteron proteron".[12]

What were criticized in the Qur'ān as "contradictions" could actually be identified as a special type of parallelism well known to Arab linguists. For example, two groups of completely different things are juxtaposed in the same passage for the reader to reflect on:

> Say; Who is the Lord of the heavens and the earth? Say; Allāh. Say; Take ye then others beside Him for protectors which even for themselves have neither benefit nor hurt? Say; Is the blind equal to the seer, or is darkness equal to light? Or assign they unto Allāh partners who created the like of His creation, so that the creation seemed alike to them? Say; Allāh is the Creator of all things and He is the One the Almighty. (13:16)

In other words, just as the blind cannot be logically considered equal to those with perfect vision, complete darkness cannot be equal to light; similarly, there is no one equal to God, no partner who can be conceived as having taken part in his creation.

The Arabs down the centuries have greatly admired and been enchanted by the Qur'ānic concinnity. Many Orientalists were incapable of visualizing this, assuming as they did that Arabs had never seen or heard masterpieces in other languages. "No Greek poet can be compared to Homer, and no Latin one to Virgil, and among English poets Shakespeare is unrivalled."[13] In fact, the comparison between the Qur'ān and the works of Shakespeare, Homer or Virgil would be pointless for many fundamental reasons.

Although no one would deny that Shakespeare's plays are masterpieces of English drama and literature, they were nonetheless written for entertainment, sometimes using ideas from old or contemporary history. The most famous works of Homer were his poems the Iliad and the Odyssey. Each is a story; the Iliad for instance describes the quarrel of Achilles with Agamemnon, the fighting of their armies, their festivities, funerals, etc. Virgil is renowned for the Aeneid. Both Homer's and Virgil's poems were surely meant to entertain rather than to instruct. On the other hand, the Qur'ān was never intended to entertain or amuse. It was revealed as a guide for worship, a code for behaviour, good ti-

dings for the believers who do benevolent work, and a warning to those who overlook the Hereafter.

The Qur'ān, besides being the source of joy, satisfaction and inspiration to successive generations of Arabic-speaking peoples over fourteen centuries, has not only been the standard for Arabic language but has even preserved the language ever since its revelation. This can never be claimed by Menezes for any of the books he mentioned.[14]

No book by Shakespeare or any other writer further back than four hundred years ago can be easily understood today. The vastness, the simplicity, as well as the inimitable sublimity of the style in the Qur'ān are unique phenomena. No book by Shakespeare, Homer or Virgil was composed over a period of twenty-three years without any sentence or word needing revision or change. No book by Shakespeare or any other mortal has moved millions of people and uplifted them from ignorance to enlightenment, from corruption to supreme nobility, and from nomad savagery to moral civilization.

MORE ORIENTALISTS' COMMENTS ON THE QUR'ĀNIC STYLE

In addition to the Orientalists who have criticized the Qur'ānic style with varying degrees of sharpness, many others have greatly admired it. Sale, for instance, stated: "It is confessedly of the utmost elegance and purity of language, . . . to its miracle did Mohammad chiefly appeal for the confirmation of his mission, publicly challenging the most eloquent men in Arabia — which was at that time stocked with thousands whose sole study and ambition was to excel in elegance of style and composition — to produce a single chapter that might be compared with it." "The style of the Qur'an is beautiful, it is adorned with bold figures after the Eastern taste, enlivened with florid and sententious expressions and in many places where the majesty and attributes of God are described, sublime and magnificent."[15]

Arberry's translation of the Qur'ān from Arabic into English has been admired by many. His impression of the Qur'ānic style was: "The complex prosody, a rich repertory of subtle and com-

plicated rhythms had been completely perfected. A vocabulary of themes, images and figures, extensive but nevertheless circumscribed, was firmly established."[16]

Several other scholars have admired the Qur'ānic style. Its poetical qualities did not prevent the Book from being a code of laws, ritual, moral and civil, a guide for common prayer and a narrative of biblical events, all in one. "This Book transformed the simple shepherds, the merchants and nomads of Arabia into warriors and empire builders."[17]

Extraordinary effects are related to the power of words when well chosen and artfully placed. Their ability to ravish and to amaze is greater than music itself. "The Qur'an succeeded so well in captivating the minds of the audience that several of the opponents thought it the effect of witchcraft and enchantment."[18]

"It is meaningless to apply adjectives as 'beautiful' or 'persuasive' to the Qur'ān; its flashing images and inexorable measures go directly to the brain and intoxicate it. It is not surprising then that a skilled Qur'ānic reciter can reduce an Arabic-speaking audience to helpless tears, that for fourteen centuries it has been ceaselessly meditated upon or that for great portions of the human race the High Speech of the seventh-century Arabia has become true accents of the Eternal."[19]

Goethe's famous comment on the Qur'ānic style was, "As often as we approach it, it always proves repulsive anew, gradually, however, it attracts, it astonishes and in the end it forces admiration."[20]

COMMENTS BY MODERN ARAB LINGUISTS

Present literary authorities at al-'Azhar University in Cairo have pointed out the following ways in which the Qur'ānic style transcends the power of man and defies imitation:[21]

1. The form of the Qur'ān reflects neither the sedentary softness of the townsmen nor the nomadic roughness of the Beduins. It possesses in right measure the sweetness of the former and the vigour of the latter.
2. The rhythms of the syllables are more sustained than in prose and less patterned than in poetry. The pauses come neither

in prose form nor in the manner of poetry but with a harmonious and melodic flow.

3. The sentences are constructed in an elegant manner which uses the smallest number of words, without sounding too brief, to express ideas of utmost richness.
4. The Qur'ānic words neither transgress by their banality nor by their extreme rarity, but are recognized as expressing admirable nobility.
5. The conciseness of expression attains such a striking clarity that the least learned Arabic-speaking person can understand the Qur'ān without difficulty. At the same time there is such a profundity, flexibility, inspiration and radiance in the Qur'ān that it serves as the basis for the principles and rules of Islamic sciences and arts for theology and the juridical schools. Thus, it is almost impossible to express the ideas of the text by only one interpretation, either in Arabic or in any other language even with the greatest care.
6. There is a perfect blend between the two antagonistic powers of reason and emotion, intellect and feeling. In the narrations, arguments, doctrines, laws and moral principles, the words have both persuasive teaching and emotive force. Throughout the whole Qur'ān the speech maintains its surprising solemnity, power and majesty which nothing can disturb.

It is known that the Qur'ān was revealed in long and short passages over a period of twenty-three years and that they have been arranged in the text neither according to their chronological order nor to their subject matter, but in an independent manifold order which may appear to some as arbitrary. When we study the text, passing from the structure of the verse to the group of verses dealing with the same subject, then to the full *Sūrah*, and finally to the whole Book, we find an overall plan which could not have been designed by man. A special melodic rhythm runs equally through it all, there is a common harmonious style and a strikingly logical plan in the development of the ideas exposed.

If we consider the general outline of the progress of the Qur'ānic teachings in the two eras of the mission, we find first the fundamental bases of the faith in the *Sūrahs* of Mecca, then the codified application of those general principles in the *Sūrahs* in Medina. This long course of events continued from the first day

of the call until the day of the last pilgrimage when the Prophet gave his farewell sermon. Nothing has been improvised in the Qur'ān. Everything was foreseen from the beginning to the end down to the last detail, including the death of the Prophet. Who could have designed and carried out such a complete plan? Who, other than God, from whom came this heavenly message?

It is quite evident that to establish such a scheme in advance the author would have had to foresee not only the events which would take place during the whole period of the mission, their problems and solutions to be prescribed in the relevant verses, but also the literary form, the melodic rhythm in which they would be expressed, the appropriate structure for the passages yet to come and the precise point in the whole framework where each revelation would be fixed. It must surely be admitted that no mortal would have been ever capable of knowing the future in such detail as to compose the Qur'ān in the way it was; and without having to revise a *Sūrah*, a verse or even a word.

THE FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE OF ALPHABETICAL LETTERS

A very interesting mathematical analysis was recently done by computer of the distribution of the alphabetical letters over the 114 *Sūrahs* of the Qur'ān. As a result, the following remarkable conclusions were reached.[22] There is an overall pattern of distribution of the alphabetical letters in each *Sūrah*. Secondly, the *Sūrahs* which begin with certain individual letters, such as *alif, lām, mīm* (*Sūrahs* **2,3,29,30** and **32**), have the highest frequency of occurrence of these specific letters, and follow a pattern in their distribution among the *Sūrahs* of the whole Book. Finally, the analysis showed that the distribution in the 114 *Sūrahs*, the distribution in the verses in each *Sūrah*, even the spellings of the words, are not random.

One illustrative example is found in two *Sūrahs* (**42** and **50**) where each starts with the individual letter *qaf*. This letter occurs 57 times in each of them, although *Sūrah* **42** is twice as long as *Sūrah* **50**. In the two together the letter *qaf* occurs 114 times — the same as the total number of *Sūrahs* in the Book. Another ex-

ample is related to the very first verse in the text: "*Bismillāh-ir-Raḥmān-ir-Raḥīm*" ("In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful"). The number of Arabic letters in this verse is 19; the word "Allāh" is repeated in the whole Book 2698 times; whereas the word *ar-Raḥmān* is repeated 57 times and *ir-Raḥīm* 114 times. Each of these numbers is divisible by 19, and so is the total number of *Sūrahs*.

To appreciate this miracle of the Qur'ān let us reflect on the following simplified example.[23] Suppose you are asked to write a book of ten unequal chapters such that the first contains the highest frequency of the letter *A*, while Chapter 2 has the highest frequency of the letters *B* and *C*. This may sound a bit difficult but it is not impossible. You will have to choose suitable words so that these conditions are fulfilled in the end. Now, if an additional proviso is added, that is the first three chapters should contain a higher percentage of the letter *D* than Chapter 4 and the last three chapters should have a lower frequency of occurrence for the letters *G* and *K* than Chapter 6, you can see that the task is already becoming formidable. Let us not forget that these mathematically controlled words should comprise useful comprehensible sentences, which are linguistically and grammatically perfect. Mathematics tells us that one has to master at least 826 quadrillion combinations of the alphabetical letters in order to produce the mathematical distribution of the alphabet in the Qur'ān. Composing the verses in such a way is an additional achievement. Having the verses in instalments over more than two decades without revising a verse or a word adds to the miraculous nature of the Book.

INDIVIDUAL LETTERS AT THE BEGINNING OF *SŪRAHS*

These letters are 14, and come in 14 combinations at the beginning of 29 *Sūrahs*. An example was cited above; another is the letters *alif, lām, rā* starting *Sūrahs* **10, 11, 12, 14** and **15**. All these letters and their combinations have aroused comments by several scholars from East and West. Muslim researchers of this subject are in almost unanimous agreement that these combinations have a mys-

tery about them and are in some way related to the miraculous nature of the Book. The main theories are summarized as follows: these letters represent a challenge for anyone to compose a literary work as awesome as the Qur'ān using the same alphabet of which these letters are examples; they are secret symbols; and they are symbolic names for the *Sūrahs* or groups of *Sūrahs* where they occur.

'Abdullāh Yusuf 'Ali in his translation of the Qur'ān discussed each of the *Sūrahs* which begins with the individual letters.[24] An example is *Sūrah* 38 which starts with the letter *ṣād*. He suggested that this letter may stand for *qaṣaṣ* (stories), in this word the major consonant is *ṣād*. "This *Sūrah*" he said, "is concerned mainly with the stories of David and Solomon as illustrative of the spiritual versus worldly powers."[25] On the same *Sūrah* (38) Sale propounded a rather strange conjecture, that the letter *ṣād* "may stand for Solomon". This is quite evidently wrong since in Arabic the letter *ṣād* does not occur in the name of Solomon.

An even wilder assertion about these individual letters was that of Nöldeke who assumed them to be monograms of the names of persons from whom the portions of the Qur'ān were collected by Zaid after the Prophet's death in order to put them in one volume. Thus, he took *alif, lām, mīm* to stand for Azzubair; *alif, lām, mīm, rā* for al-Mughīra; *ṭaha* for Ṭalḥa and so on. "They may otherwise," he claimed, "have been alphabetical labels for the boxes of scraps in which the original was kept."[26] Strangely enough, these assumptions of Nöldeke's were hailed by Palmer as "ingenious theories".[27] A moment's reflection, however, shows that they are far-fetched for several reasons. To begin with the Prophet's companions would have never dared to add or delete any one letter to, or from, the divine material which is most carefully cherished by the Muslim community. Secondly, history records that these individual letters were revealed with their respective *Sūrahs* and were pronounced by the Prophet in their proper place among the verses, long before Zaid and his committee obtained boxes or used labels — if he actually used any. Furthermore, if these letters were monograms or labels what about the majority of the *Sūrahs* which do not start with such letters?

Yet another mistaken hypothesis was ventured by Margoliouth who described the mysterious letters as "least intelligible . . . most

probably they are no more than trials of the pen or voice before starting the writing or recitation"[28] Thus, we see the striking contrast between the scholarly and the irresponsible comments on the subject of the individual letters. It would be wise to seek illumination from the following divine example:

> Alif, Lām, Rā, this is a Book whose verses have been perfectly designed then elucidated. It comes from a wise Omniscient. (**11:1**)

The subject matter of the Qur'ān

After discussing the Qur'ānic style and the various comments on it, I suggest we now study a few of the many verses whose subject matter could not have been devised by Muḥammad, no matter how creative his imagination. Nor could it have been taught to him by any mortal, as will be noticed in the following paragraphs. Several more verses are studied elsewhere.[29]

> He created the heavens without pillars that you see and cast firm mountains on the earth lest it should be convulsed with you, and He spread on it animals of every kind. (**31:10**)

This indicates that heavenly bodies are raised away from the earth by forces — gravitational and centrifugal — which we do not see with our eyes. If this verse were composed by Muḥammad before the discovery of the gravity of earth and other planets and before the present knowledge about the universe, why would he include the phrase "that you see"? Why did he not simply say: "He created the heavens without pillars"? Furthermore, how could Muḥammad have conceived that the presence of mountains in their places and with their respective masses perfects the mechanical balance of the earth about its axis of rotation so that we, its inhabitants, would not feel any convulsions or vibrations while it spins at such an extremely high speed?

> Have you seen the water which you drink? Did you bring it down from the clouds or are We the Bringer? If We pleased We

> could have made it saltish*, why give you not thanks? (56: 68–69)

If these were Muḥammad's own words how could it have occurred to him that there will be attempts by man to bring down rain? And how could he have known that rain, which is usually distilled and pure water, could ever be saltish or distasteful to drink? Why did he not just say: "If We pleased We could have stopped it"?

> It is He Who rendered the sun a lamp and the moon a light. (10:5)

> Have you not seen how God created seven heavens alike and He rendered the moon in them a light and He rendered the sun a lamp. (71:15, 16)

> Neither is it for the sun to overtake the moon, nor can the night outstrip the day. And each floats in an orbit. (36:40)

How could Muḥammad have known, or who could have taught him that the sun is a source of light — a "lamp" — but not the moon although it is lighted? How could he have known that the bright full moon is not a "lamp" emitting its own light? And how could he have known that the sun moves to include him with those which "float in an orbit"?

> And not the weight of any atom in the earth or in the heavens is hidden from thy Lord, nor anything smaller than that nor greater, but it is (all) in a clear book. (10:61)

> Surely Allāh wrongs not the weight of an atom, and if it is a good deed He multiplies it and gives from Himself a great reward. (4:40)

How could Muḥammad ever have conceived of atoms and how could he have thought of them in an individual sense and said "any atom"? And how could it ever have occurred to him that there is "anything smaller" than atoms fourteen centuries ago,

* The Arabic word *'ojāj* does not accurately mean "saltish". It means unpleasant to taste either because it is too bitter, too acid or caustic. Geophysicists now know that lightning discharges, which usually accompany rain, can lead to chemical reactions between atmospheric oxygen and nitrogen to form nitrogen oxides, which could easily dissolve in the rain water, to produce nitrous or nitric acid, before it falls.

when the Arabs used to consider the minimal weight to be that of a mustard seed or a mosquito's wing?

> We shall show them Our signs in farthest regions and within themselves until it is manifest to them that it is the Truth. Is it not enough that thy Lord is Witness over all things? (41:53)

Again, how could the Prophet have known, or been told by any mortal, that man would be able to see things so far away from earth, in outer space, and would also be able to see things within himself; so many centuries before telescopes, X-rays or microscopes were ever invented, discovered or even imagined?

> And surely there is a lesson for you in the cattle; We give you to drink of what is in their bellies, coming from a conjunction between digested dregs and blood, pure milk which is easily imbibed by drinkers. (16:66)

The fact that milk is produced in the animal by its mammary glands which are nourished by the products of food digestion carried to them by the blood stream is a scientific discovery of modern times and one which was not known before the twentieth century.[30] So, how could Muḥammad have thought of it if he were the writer of the above verse?

> And certainly We have created man of an extract of clay. Then We fashioned him into a small quantity (of liquid) in a firm resting place.
> Then We made the small quantity of liquid a clot*, and We fashioned the clot into a lump (of zygote), then We fashioned the lump into bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, then We caused it to grow into another creation. So with blessing be Allāh the best of Creators. (23:12–14)

> Those who disbelieve (in Our Messages) We shall make them enter Fire; as often as their skins are burned, We shall change them for other skins that they may taste the chastisement. (4:56)

Yet again, who could have taught Muḥammad the accurate scientific information about the distinct stages of development of the embryo in the womb, the correct description of the fertilizing li-

* The literal meaning of the word clot "'*alaq*" is "something that clings."

quid (76:2) and also about the fact that the nerves of feeling are concentrated in the skin so that once the skin is burnt the sense of feeling fades? (Islamic concepts of the Hereafter will be discussed in detail in Part II of the book.)

> We shall rescue your body to render you as a sign for subsequent generations. And surely most of the people are heedless of Our signs. (10:92)

This was addressed to the Pharaoh of Egypt who chased Moses and the Israelites across the Red Sea and was drowned in it. His body was salvaged and the Egyptians buried him in his royal tomb; that took place about two thousand years before the Prophet's time.

Very much later, that is early in the present century, with the numerous excavations carried out in Egypt, the Pharaoh's body was discovered and put on display in the museum in Cairo where it is now to be seen. Is it at all credible that Muḥammad could have known about the rescue of the body, its discovery, and its display for "subsequent generations"? Could any mortal of Muḥammad's time have foretold this?

The Qur'ān contains several verses of prophetic nature, which corroborate its divine origin. These have predicted events which took place years later, as recorded in history. Here are a few examples:

> And your Lord will surely give you so that you will be well pleased. (93:5)

> Soon shall the hosts be defeated and they shall turn their backs. (54:45)

These two verses were revealed early in the Prophet's mission when he was in Mecca. He and his few believers were then being subjected to severe persecutions of all kinds. Victory and glory, which could never have been conceived by a mortal then, came to him years later in Medina.

> You shall certainly enter the sacred mosque if Allāh pleases in security, your heads shaved and hair cut short, not fearing. (48:27)

This verse came down shortly after the Prophet and his companion pilgrims were barred from Mecca and were humiliated by its

disbelieving citizens. The following year, the Prophet and his companions were to enter the Mosque as peaceful pilgrims.

> The Romans are vanquished, in a near land, and they after their defeat will gain victory, within some years. God's is the command before and after. And on that day the believers will rejoice. (30:1–4)

This was one of the Meccan revelations predicting that the Romans of the Eastern Empire who suffered a shattering defeat under the Persians at about the beginning of the seventh century, would shortly be victorious. In the first battle, when this verse was revealed, the Persians conquered Syria and made themselves masters of Palestine and sacked Jerusalem, both important parts of the Roman Empire. That defeat distressed the Romans so much that no one could then visualize them retrieving their fortune. So, against all expectations, the above prophecy came true after about nine years, when the Romans not only drove the Persians out of Byzantium, but carried them into Persia and despoiled the city of Madayen.[31] The same verse includes another item of good tidings — that the "believers will rejoice." In fact the Muslims celebrated the Romans' victory, being co-believers against the Persian disbelievers (Zoroastrians). At almost the same time, the Muslims won a victory in their major battle of Badr against the Meccans.

> Or say they: A poet, we await for him the evil accidents of time. Say: await, I await along with you. (52:30–31)

The disbelievers of Mecca were being defied by this verse, which stated that the Prophet would not die suddenly before delivering his message in full. He died peacefully about twenty years after this revelation, and after the whole divine message had been fully delivered. Had Muḥammad been the author, with or without help from any mortal, how could he have dared to include such unwarranted passages and put his mission at stake? Conversely, how could he have been so certain of the future?

One should notice that the Prophet never spoke in the Qur'ān. He was either referred to as the third person or addressed directly.[32] He was also reproached more than once for not doing the recommended thing. These reproaches he accepted with resignation, and are to be found engraved in the Book for ever. He was also comforted at times when his spirit was dejected. Here are some examples of such addresses:

> O, Messenger, deliver that which has been revealed to you from your Lord; and if thou do it not thou hast not delivered His message and Allāh will protect thee from men. Surely Allāh guides not the disbelieving people. (5:66–67)
>
> It is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. And if he had fabricated against Us some sayings, We would certainly have siezed him by the mighty hand, then cut off his life's vein; and not one of you would have withheld Us from him. (69:43–47)
>
> And Muḥammad is but a messenger, messengers have already passed away before him. If then he dies or is killed, will you turn back upon your heels? And he who turns back upon his heels will do no harm at all to Allāh. And Allāh will reward the grateful (2:143)
>
> Have We not expanded for thee thy breast? and removed from thee thy burden which weighed thy back? and exalted for thee thy mention? so truly with the hardship there is ease. With the hardship is surely ease. So when thou art free work hard and make thy Lord thy exclusive aim. (94:1–8)

Conclusion

Now, after having some notions about the literary style of the Qur'ān, its subject matter, its prophecies, and how Muḥammad is addressed in it:

> And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant then produce a *Sūrah* like unto it and call your helpers other than Allāh if you are truthful.
> But if you do it not, and you can never do it, then be on your guard against the Fire whose fuel is men and rocks, it is prepared for the disbelievers. (2:23–24)

If Muḥammad was indeed the author of the Qur'ān would he have ever dared challenge all men to compose a *Sūrah* like it? Would he have declared with such certainty: "and you can never do it"? In fact, this challenge still stands.

Chapter 3

First Writing of the Qur'ān

The revelations came down in instalments

The contents of the Qur'ān were made known to the early Muslim community in instalments between the years 610 and 532. This has been universally recognized by scholars and historians from East and West, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. 'Ali and Kamāl[1] have mentioned that in the first five years of the Prophet's mission in Mecca 52 *Sūrahs*, most of them short, were revealed comprising one tenth of the volume of the Qur'ān. During the ensuing eight years in Mecca about 60 per cent more was revealed. In the next ten years the Muslim community grew gradually into a self-governing state in Medina where the remaining 30 per cent of the divine Book came down, including the longest *Sūrahs*.

Early memorizing and writing of the Qur'ān

Dating from very early during the Prophet's mission, even from the first revelation itself, divine emphasis has been laid on both

writing and frequent reciting of the Qur'ānic verses. The very earliest verse reads:

> Recite [or read] in the Name of your Lord Who created.
> Created man from a clot.
> Recite [or read] and your Lord is Most Generous.
> Who taught by the pen, taught man what he knew not. (96:1–5)

The *Sūrah* which came down next began as follows:

> *Nūn*, by the pen and that which they inscribe,
> by the grace of your Lord you are not a man possessed. (68:1–2)

We can feel the emphasis on both reciting and writing made so clear from the very beginning.

Then, in the third *Sūrah* we read:

> O thou covering thyself up, rise to pray by night except a little,
> half of it or lessen it a little,
> or add to it, and recite the Qur'ān in measure. (73:1–4)

It is noted that the chronological order of these *Sūrahs* (1,2,3,) differs from their order in the Qur'ānic text (96,68,73). This difference between the textual and chronological orders of the *Sūrahs* will be discussed later in the chapter.

From the earliest days the Islamic practice has been the memorizing, writing down and treasuring of every part of the Qur'ān. It is well known historically that the Qur'ānic revelations were recorded by the Prophet's scribes under his direct supervision: being illiterate himself, he never wrote but always dictated.[2]

Among the first to believe in Islam were Abu-Bakr, 'Ali-ibn-Abi-Ṭālib, 'Othmān-ibn-'Affān, Zaid-ibn-Thābit, 'Omar-ibnel-Khaṭṭāb and others who could master reading and writing. Loving the Prophet so dearly — as do all Muslims — they used to remain with him most of the time, learning the faith from him and memorizing whatever he said and did, sometimes down to the minutest detail. The Prophet appointed 'Othmān, Zaid and others as his scribes. Their number increased with the gradual growth of the Muslim community to forty-two towards the end of the Prophet's mission.

Muslims have always piously cherished and highly honoured the Qur'ān. To them it is the word of God. So, using their excep-

tionally retentive memories the early Muslims of Arabia fervently learnt by heart and secured in their breasts every revelation they heard verbatim from the Prophet. They had ample time to memorize every single revelation because they came down at considerable intervals. The entire Qur'ān, comprising 77,639 words, descended over a period of twenty-three years.

One of the highly favoured Muslim acts of worship has been to recite several Qur'ānic *Sūrahs* in the five daily prayers. Fervent Muslims have followed the Prophet's example by reciting long *Sūrahs* for hours in their prayers at night. Many used in the distant past, and still today, to recite by memory the whole Qur'ān, or to read it through from beginning to end once every month or less. Thus every Muslim to this day has memorized some *Sūrahs*, at least the ones essential for the daily prayers. It is also well known in Islamic history that hundreds of the Prophet's companions learnt the entire Book by heart. The Prophet was quoted by 'Othmān-ibn-'Affān to have said: "The best among you is he who learns the Qur'ān and teaches it. Whoever reads the Qur'ān will earn a divine reward for every letter he reads, and the reward is tenfold."[3]

Leading the congregational prayers and even leading a group of Muslims on any mission used to be the privilege of those who carried more in their hearts of the Qur'ān than did their brethren.

Historical evidence

There are two kinds of historical evidence of the Qur'ān being written down as an integrated book in the Prophet's lifetime. The Qur'ān itself, which is most important, and the reliable historical records of events that took place during the Prophet's mission are both considered.

Since its earliest revelation, the Qur'ān has referred to the words "Pen" and "Reciting"; some of the relevant verses have already been quoted above. Furthermore, the Qur'ān refers to itself in more than one place as a "Book", sometimes even in the definitive expression "the Book". An example was given earlier and here is another:

> And this is a Blessed Book We have revealed, verifying that which is before it. (6:93)

Thus, from the start of the Prophet's mission the Qur'ān was clearly meant as a book containing definite chapters and each revelation having its prescribed place in it. Shortly before the Prophet's death the Book was complete in every detail.

One should hasten to add here that the existence of every word of the Book has been known without any doubt since first the scribes began to record it. Moreover, the specific place of each word in the whole was also known — despite the fact that the materials used were not sheets of paper bearing consecutive numbers and bound in one volume.

The disbelievers were challenged on more than one occasion to bring ten or even "one *Sūrah* like unto it";

> And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a *Sūrah* like unto it and call on your helpers other than Allāh if you are truthful. (2:23)

Surely this further proves that Qur'ānic *Sūrahs* were known during the Prophet's time and that each had its constituent verses. Every *Sūrah* as an integrated unit would be a physical challenge to the disbelievers to produce one like it.

Islamic history bears ample witness to the fact that Qur'ānic revelations were recorded in writing under the Prophet's personal supervision. His scribes who were often with him and to whom he dictated the heavenly message, were well known to their fellow Muslims. Even under the hardest circumstances, when the small Muslim community was being cruelly persecuted by the disbelievers, these scribes were always present around the Prophet to record in writing every verse as it came down to him. When the Prophet and his close friend Abu-Bakr left Mecca and emigrated to Medina, they carried among the necessities of their journey "writing materials", and Abu-Bakr himself was one of the Prophet's scribes.[4]

'Othmān, whose name is particularly associated with the collection of the Qur'ān, was among the earliest believers. 'Othmān had remained with the Prophet almost since the call and was destined to become the third caliph. He was quoted to have said: "It was customary with the Messenger of Allāh that when portions of various *Sūrahs* were revealed to him and when any verse was revealed, he called one of the persons who used to write the Qur'ān and said to him: 'Write these verses in such a *Sūrah* next to such a verse.'"[5] In addition to the official records of the Qur'ān made by

the Prophet's scribes under his supervision, many other copies were written by some of his companions for their personal use. For example, a copy belonged to 'Ali-ibn-Abi Ṭālib while another was prepared by 'Abdullāh-ibn-Mas'ūd who used to make explanatory notes in the margin.[6]

The two stories relating how Labīb-ibn-Rabī'ah and 'Omar-ibnel-Khaṭṭāb accepted Islam were summarized in Chapter 2. In each case a part of a *Sūrah* was written down on a sheet, which proves that Qur'ānic *Sūrahs* have been known entities and recording them in writing has been a tradition from the start of Islamic history. In fact, literacy was considered very important by the Prophet and his followers. It was eagerly sought for the community in every possible way. In the battle of Badr — the first major battle between the Prophet and his enemies — the Muslims were able to capture scores of the disbelievers, some of whom were set free in return for their teaching a few illiterate Muslims how to read and write.

Despite all this evidence certain Orientalists have denied the early formation of the *Sūrahs* and assumed that the verses were merely "scattered messages to be discarded once they [had] served their purpose".[7] Nöldeke, overlooking the patently clear historical facts, insisted on the claim — based on nothing but a figment of his imagination — that the Prophet could not have had access to writing the revelations, nor did he care for it during his mission.[8]

There are blatant examples of similar commentators in the last century who appeared with scathing allegations like: "Apart from its preposterous arrangements, the Qur'ān is not so much a book as a collection of manifestos, diatribes, edicts, discourses, sermons and such-like pieces".[9] Describing the sacred Book as "preposterous" shows how far away from the scholarly approach a prejudiced commentator can stray.

Other scholars, however, have recognized the integrity of the Qur'ān and remarked how some of the Prophet's friends had learned by heart a stated number of *Sūrahs*. 'Abdullāh-ibn-Mas'ūd, for instance, memorized seventy *Sūrahs* from the Prophet's own lips whereas Muḥammad himself repeated seventy *Sūrahs* on his deathbed.[10]

Thus it is quite evident that every Qur'ānic verse was recorded in writing under the Prophet's personal supervision. The *Sūrah* in which it was included and its sequence relative to the other verses was followed according to his instructions. The textual order of

the verses in each *Sūrah* and of the different *Sūrahs* in the Qur'ān as a whole were set by him and adhered to by the community. Countless believers have ardently memorized all the *Sūrahs* in the order prescribed by the Prophet.

Chronological and textual orders

As mentioned in the previous chapter the textual order followed by the *Sūrahs* throughout the volume of the Book is basically different from the chronological order of their revelations. There are even *Sūrahs* in which verses revealed in Medina are to be found among those which came down in Mecca much earlier. The point is that each revelation came down to meet a specific occasion in the life of the developing Muslim community in Mecca or Medina.

Although occasionally a few verses date back to a period many years before or after the revelation of the rest of the *Sūrah*, the whole, once complete, is perfectly closely knit, the themes flowing gracefully throughout.[11] The individual verses, with their wealth of ideas, are like precious stones. Quite a number of Occidental commentators became dazzled to such an extent by the brilliance of the ideas evinced in the individual verses that they were unable to perceive the pattern linking them all together.

As it happened, the chronological order of the revelations produced the gradual progress in teachings of the faith and in legislation for the growing community. To illustrate this we may consider the main outline of the successive stages in the preaching of the faith. This began with the simple divine command, "Recite!" in the *Sūrah* first to be revealed; its chronological order is C.O.1 while its textual order is T.O. 96:

> Recite [or Read] in the Name of your Lord Who created.

Then the apostolic duty was imposed, "Warn!" (C.O. 4, T.O. 74):

> O thou who wrap yourself up, arise and warn, and thy Lord do glorify.

Later on the Prophet was ordered to preach to his nearest kin (C.O. 47, T.O. 26):

> And warn thy nearest relations and lower thy wing unto the believers who follow thee.

Next the message was extended to the whole of Mecca, the main town (the mother of towns) and to her surroundings (C.O. 55, T.O. 6).

Ultimately the message was addressed to humanity at large:

> Surely in this is a message for a people who serve (Us). And We have not sent you except as a mercy to the worlds. (21:106–107)

It should by now be manifestly clear that the Qur'ān as a book is not at all ordinary. Had it been a mere history book its accounts of events would have followed a chronological sequence. Were it just a record of what took place during the Prophet's lifetime or mission it would have been basically different. It is certainly not the same as any of the Gospels which recorded the deeds and sayings of Jesus (peace be upon him) chronologically as recalled by some of his disciples. Nor is there a resemblance to a straightforward book which discusses a particular topic, proceeding from an introduction to the core of the subject to end up in a conclusion. The Qur'ān is not like any of these. It was revealed by Allāh to give great comfort to the heart, vast satisfaction to the intellect and clear guidance to the souls of those who read it, recite it, or listen to it. As for anyone who does not believe in God, he or she will miss the whole message contained in the divine words.

One of the unique properties of the Qur'ān is that usually any one verse, any few verses together and any one *Sūrah* can very well stand alone as a complete and inspiring entity.

TITLES OF THE *SŪRAHS*

Muḥammad used to refer to each *Sūrah* by a title related to its subject matter. For instance, *Sūrah* 2 is entitled "The Heifer" as it describes the story of Moses when he ordered his followers to sacrifice a heifer. *Sūrah* 3 is entitled "The Family of 'Imrān" as it mentions the family so named, particularly Mary, Jesus, Zakharias and John the Baptist. *Sūrah* 16 is entitled "The Cave" as it deals with the cave and the seven sleepers who fled there seeking refuge from persecution, and so on.

Certain *Sūrahs* were given more than one name by the Prophet and his companions: *Sūrah* 1, for example, is called "*Al-Fātiḥah*" (The Opener) as it is placed at the beginning. Other names include "*Um-el-Qur'ān*", (the leader of the Book); the "Essence of the Qur'ān", and "*Al-Ḥamd*", or "*Al-Hamdo Lillāh Rabbil-'ālamīn*", as it starts with the verse "Praise be to Allāh the Lord of the Worlds."

THE TEXTUAL ORDER WAS KNOWN IN THE PROPHET'S TIME

The earliest written copies of the Qur'ān were inscribed on scattered sheets and slabs of various materials and thus far from being orderly. However, the whole volume of the revelations had its definite pattern in the Prophet's mind and in the memories of the faithful, with each verse and group of verses fitting into their specific place in the structure of the whole. Hundreds of his companions, called "Qur'ān Bearers", were authorities on reciting the Book from memory from beginning to end, knowing every *Sūrah* and its place in the text. In addition, many knew the occasion on which each verse was revealed.

Had there been no textual order, or if this order had not been generally known, it would have been impossible to learn the entire Book by heart. There has been a tradition since the Prophet's time for the *imām* (who leads the congregational prayer) to follow the textual order during his Qur'ānic recitation. In case he does not, he is at once corrected by members of the congregation. Such correction could never have been possible had the textual order not been familiar to them.

It so happens that there is ample evidence proving the Prophet had set a textual order for the *Sūrahs*, both in the form of the instructions to his companions and in his own recitations of successive *Sūrahs*. Anas, one of his companions, reported how the Prophet had instructed them to divide the rest of the Qur'ān, after "The Opener", into seven consecutive divisions. The first of these was to be composed of three *Sūrahs*, followed by five, then seven, nine, eleven, thirteen *Sūrahs* and finally all the remaining ones. The last division commenced with the *Sūrah* entitled "*Qāf*".[12] Adding the first *Sūrah*, ("The Opener") to this succession we find the one entitled "*Qāf*" numbered 50. This *Sūrah* carries the

identical number in the present-day *Muṣ-ḥafs*, reaffirming that the textual order of the *Sūrahs* prescribed by Muḥammad has remained unchanged. The opening *Sūrah* aptly named "*Al-Fātiḥah*" by the Prophet, proves, by occupying the same position in the *Muṣ-ḥaf* today, that it was indeed the first *Sūrah* from the beginning.

Muḥammad was also reported by some of his friends, including 'Othmān and Sa'īd-ibn-Khāled, to have recited *Sūrah* 2, "*Al-Baqarah*", and then *Sūrah* 3, "*Āl 'Imrān*", while leading the congregation. In another prayer he recited the first eight *Sūrahs* consecutively as they are now recorded in the sacred text. In yet another prayer he recited the *Sūrahs* "*Al-Isrā'*" ("The Night Journey"), "*Al-Kahf*" ("The Cave"), "*Maryam*" ("Mary"), "*Ṭaha*", "*Al-'Anbia*" ("The Prophets").[13] These *Sūrahs* are found arranged in the same sequence today numbered **17, 18, 19, 20, 21**, consecutively.

This surely disproves a recent assertion by Wansbrough that the Qur'ān was "a rough coordination of separate logia", as a product of "an organic development during a long period of transmission", over several generations, or even "a period of approximately two centuries during which the text of scripture was anything but stable".[14] One simply wonders on what logical grounds do such Orientalists base their wild conjecture? Most probably Wansbrough, completely overlooking the facts cited above, became confused and mixed up the Qur'ān with the *ḥadīth* (the Prophet's own sayings and traditions). The latter were scrutinized and recorded about two centuries after the Prophet's death; the renowned treatises of al-Bokhāry and Muslim were written during that era.

In fact, the strongest evidence to prove that the textual order did exist in the Prophet's time is to be found in the Qur'ān itself. In *Sūrah* **75** we read:

> Surely on Us (rests) the collecting of it and the reciting of it. So when We have recited it follow its recitation. (75:17–18)

Here "collecting of it" means putting it together, that is arranging the verses and *Sūrahs*. This "collecting" or "arranging" of the *Sūrahs* could only be made according to a certain order which is divine. It is thus clear that not only the revelations were from Allāh but also that their collection and arrangement were divinely inspired.

However, Orientalists have overlooked these historical facts probably as a result of not fully understanding the language. Some could not see beyond the rhymes. Bell, for instance, maintained that, "a detailed study of their structure discloses evidences of revisions and alterations.... That passages were not only placed in certain Surahs but were sometimes adapted to their position in them, is shown by the occurrence of hidden rhymes".[15] Had any verse been so adapted or changed in any way it could scarcely have been concealed in the course of Islamic history where even the minutest detail regarding the Qur'ān is there to be seen.[16]

Certain Orientalists, noticing that the revelations used to be inscribed on separate pieces of paper, tablets, leather, the shoulder blades of animals and stems of palm leaves, have falsely assumed that there was no textual order. Bell, for example, could see nothing but, "a multitude of disconnected pieces, sudden changes of subject, even grammatical breaks".[17] Attempting to support this assumption he went on to say: "Their presence would be explained if we were to assume that it had stood on the back of a scrap of paper on which the addition was written, and that both sides of the paper had been read and copied consecutively." He cited the following verses to illustrate his point: "In Surah 84 verses (13–15) destroy the balance of the preceding piece (verses 7–12) which is complete as it stands." Now these verses mean:

> Then, as to him who is given his book in his right hand,
> his account will be taken by an easy reckoning,
> and he will return to his people rejoicing;
> and as to him who is given his book behind his back;
> he will call for perdition,
> and enter into burning fire;
> surely he was formerly joyful among his people;
> surely he thought that he would never return (to Allāh),
> Yes, surely his Lord is ever Seer of him. (84: 7–15)

These verses evidently portray a scene of the Hereafter in some detail. A comparison is drawn between a person who is righteous and another who has concentrated only on this world and denied the day of reckoning. The former will be presented with his record in his right hand, will be pleased with his work and will rejoice with his people (84:7–9). The disbeliever, on the other hand, will feel wretched, will be given his record of bad deeds in a humiliating way behind his back and will be severely punished by

fire (84:10–12). He should blame no one but himself because during his life he drowned himself in worldly pleasures among his people, deliberately ignoring his Lord — who saw him at all times — and had denied the certainty that he would return to Him for reckoning (84:13–15).

We can thus see that the verses 7–12 are not complete as they stand and the verses 13–15 actually perfect the account of the scene by giving its background. The Muslim concept of the Hereafter will be discussed in detail in Part II of this book.

Collection of the written Qur'ānic texts

For the first year following the Prophet's death no one worried about a written copy of the Qur'ān because there were many oral witnesses among the Muslim community as living copies of the Qur'ān. But when, about a year later, over seventy of the "Qur'ān Bearers" were killed in the battle named "*Al-Yamāmah*" it became imperative to guard against the sudden total loss of these oral copies. It therefore became a matter of extreme urgency to gather the material into a single volume which would be easy to handle and use for reference. The idea was suggested to Abu-Bakr, the first caliph and the closest friend of the Prophet, by 'Omar-ibnel-Khaṭṭāb — himself another eminent companion. After hesitating at first, saying, "How can I do a thing which the Prophet, peace and Allāh's blessings be upon him, has not done?" Abu-Bakr was gradually convinced that 'Omar was right.

This incident shows how much the Qur'ān was cherished by the Prophet's companions and by the Muslims at large. Abu-Bakr sent for Zaid-ibn-Thābit, one of the scribes who had written down most of the revelations in the Prophet's presence and under his guidance. Zaid was distinguished also as being one of those who had learnt the whole Qur'ān by heart and who was an authority on its various subjects and methods of recitation. Zaid had attended numerous recitations including the last given by the Prophet himself, and was a man admired for his integrity and competence.

'Omar then delivered a sermon in which he gave an order to the community: "Whoever received from the Messenger of God any part of the Qur'ān in writing under his supervision may he bring it out to Zaid."[18]

Zaid and a colleague, 'Amr, sat at the door of the mosque and everyone who had any Qur'ānic verse written down brought it over to them. But no material was accepted as authentic unless two of the Prophet's friends testified that it had actually been written down in his presence and under his direct supervision. This testimony was intended as an extra safeguard for the purity and authenticity of the text. In other words, it was not considered sufficient just to have the Qur'ān written down from memory — many of the community having learnt it by heart. Nor was Abu-Bakr satisfied with the mere collecting of the written material — there were a number of such records, some containing explanatory notes. Since the Muslim community held the sacred Book extremely dear, nothing less than the most scrupulous care had to be exercised in its collection.

Accordingly, the official copy thus prepared was distinct from other personal copies by its absolute precision which excluded from the text any explanatory notes and even the titles of the *Sūrahs*. It was written down by Zaid on sheets of paper which were tied together and kept in Abu-Bakr's custody. Before his death he handed it over to 'Omar-ibnel-Khaṭṭāb who became the second caliph. When 'Omar was about to die he did not want to nominate a specific successor, preferring to leave this to the people to decide by vote. Until that time the safest repository for this single reference copy of supremest value would be with 'Omar's daughter Ḥafṣah, who in addition was also a widow of the Prophet.

All of these historical facts have been ignored by certain writers who have even evinced surprise when informed of them, and by others who entertained the notion that the Qur'ān was the result of centuries of organic development.[19]

ISSUING OF THE STANDARD COPIES

It is recorded in Islamic history[20] how, about twenty years after the Prophet's death, one of his companions named Ḥothaifah-ibnel-Yamān, on returning to Medina from the district of Arme-

nia — where he had met a number of Muslims from various provinces — told the Caliph 'Othmān of a disturbing new development. Ḥothaifah had noticed a significant difference between the styles of reading the Qur'ān expressed by the Syrians and Iraqis. Syria and Iraq were two provinces which had newly adopted the faith and their language was not originally Arabic. Ḥothaifah voiced his great concern to 'Othmān: "Rescue this nation before their differences grow with time until they reach the magnitude of differences among the Jews and Christians."

Alarmed, 'Othmān at once appointed under his close supervision a committee of twelve members headed by Zaid-ibn-Thābit. This committee included several of the Prophet's scribes. Zaid was the one who had been entrusted with the task of making the earlier collection which 'Othmān gave to the twelve members ordering them to make several copies. Among 'Othmān's instructions to the committee were included the stipulations that they should write nothing but the Qur'ānic verses and that they should keep to the same order of verses and *sūrahs* as laid down by the Prophet himself and as memorized by the Qur'ān Bearers. 'Othmān further stipulated an adherence to the same style of writing, which allowed for the several methods of recitation as recognized during the Prophet's time; and that the handwriting should agree with the Arabic dialect used by the Quraish, the Prophet's tribe in Mecca.[21]

In the course of their work, it was reported, the committee differed among themselves regarding the word *tābūt*. The Quraishy members said, "we say it is *tābūt*", whereas Zaid, who came from another tribe in Medina, declared, "we call it *tābūb*." In the end they had to resort to 'Othmān who instructed them to follow the Quraishy dialect and write the word to read *tābūt*.[22]

Of the completed official copies 'Othmān ordered three to be sent to Syria, Iraq and Mecca respectively, and one to be kept in Medina. The original was returned to Ḥafṣah. Finally, the caliph issued an order for all the unofficial *Muṣ-ḥafs* to be burnt.

Such clear historical evidence has been recognized by many Orientalists. It was even admitted by Menezes[23] that: "The pious veneration with which the whole body of the Musulmans from the very first regarded his revelations as the word of God, the devotion with which they committed them to memory and the evidence that transcripts existed even from an early period of Mohammed's ministry, combined with the fact that Zaid's collection came into immediate and unquestionable use, all leave no

doubt in the mind that the Qur'an contains the very words delivered by the Prophet. The few variations are confined almost entirely to the vowel forms and the diacritical points which are inventions of later periods which were not existent in Zaid's time."

In fact, diacritics were not needed in the early years of Islam when the Muslim community was mainly Arab and well versed in their language. In those days the letters *ba*, *ta*, *tha*, *nūn*, and *ya* all looked alike (ٮ) but could easily be distinguished by Arab readers, helped by the context and phrase meaning. However, during the first century A.H.* a number of non-Arab nations accepted Islam and began to learn Arabic so as to be able to read the sacred Book and to say their prayers. Naturally they were faced with difficulties in reading Arabic. It was then that the eminent linguist 'Abul-'Asswad-ed-Do'aly introduced the dots to some letters and other diacritics to convey the sound of short (as different from long) vowels. Thus the script became different for different letters, (*ba* ب, *ta* ت, *tha* ث, *nūn* ن, *ya* ي). As a result, correct reading of the Qur'ān became possible, even for those with a limited knowledge of the language.[24]

PRESENT-DAY MUṢ-ḤAFS

In the course of the last fourteen centuries, the Qur'ān has been reprinted thousands and thousands of times in Arabic without the slightest change of sentence, word or even one letter. No change has taken place in the order of the verses in each *Sūrah*, nor in the *Sūrahs* throughout the text. Only a few discrepancies of diacritics are found which affect some vowels in certain Arabic characters and accordingly may emphasize one or other shade of meaning of specific words. These variations in some diacritics and full stops have led Sale to state that: "There are seven principal editions, if I may so call them, or ancient copies of that Book, two of which were published and used at Medina, a third at Mecca, a fourth at Kufa, a fifth at Baṣra, a sixth in Syria, and a seventh entitled the common edition. Of these editions, the first makes the whole number of verses 6,000, the second and fifth 6,214, the third 6,219, the fourth 6,236, the sixth 6,226 and the last 6,225. But

* After the Prophet's *Hijra*, emigration, to Medina

they all contain the same number of words, 77,639, the same number of letters 323,015."[25]

On the same theme of textual purity Muir has indicated that probably no other book in the world had remained for centuries with so pure a text, while Margoliouth observed, that the theory of "colouring by the medium" adopted by Christian theologians in order to explain discrepancies in their scriptures was wholly unknown in Islam.[26] Similarly, Menezes commented: "There is every probability that the work of Zaid was executed faithfully and indeed the acceptance of the Qur'an by Ali and his party, the antagonists to Othman, is the surest guarantee of its genuineness."[27]

Against the unanimous agreement of the Muslim community and their extreme care in recording the Qur'ān, as explained above, Burton has recently put forward the preposterous assumption that the "present-day *Muṣ-ḥaf* is an incomplete record of the Qur'ān".[28] Burton, it seems, having heard about certain personal copies of the Muṣ-ḥaf such as those belonging to Ibn-Mas'ūd and 'Obayy who used to write explanatory notes in the margins, erroneously assumed such notes to belong to the Qur'ān proper.

SCIENCES AND ARTS RELATED TO THE QUR'ĀN

It cannot be overemphasized that for a person to claim authority on any topic he or she should be well versed in its various aspects as well as the related subjects. Accordingly, anyone who claims to be an authority on the Qur'ān must be well versed in the relevant sciences and arts, in addition to perfecting his knowledge of the Arabic language.

The sciences and arts related to the Qur'ān are numerous. Roughly five centuries ago, in his book *Al-Itqān fi-'Olūmil-Qur'ān*, Galalud-Dīn As-Sayouṭy classified these sciences into eighty groups, noting that if detailed to their subheadings they would total 300. They are collected here under a limited number of headings for reason of limited space:

1. Sciences related to occasions, dates and places of the revelations, including the verses revealed in Mecca, Medina or elsewhere; the verses revealed by day or by night; in

winter or summer; while the Prophet was in town or travelling, etc.

2. Sciences dealing with the order and reasons for the various revelations; what was codified on or after its revelation; what was or was not previously revealed to earlier Prophets; and records of how the verses were revealed, etc.
3. Sciences concerned with abrogations including the wording and meaning and various theories.
4. Sciences covering the literary style, its words and their origin; its grammatical rules, metaphors, tropes, syntactics, semantics, etc.
5. The history of the scribes who first wrote down the divine revelations; the history of the Qur'ān Bearers who learned it by heart; and the history of those who were the first to teach it.
6. Sciences discussing the miraculous nature of the sacred Book; its prophecies, their related history; the ways in which the Qur'ān excels; its properties, etc.
7. The rules and codes of behaviour for individuals and societies as laid down in the Qur'ān; their various aspects; elaborations by various scholars, etc.
8. The physical and other sciences mentioned or hinted at; their enumeration; the early achievements in them by the Muslims; their history, etc.
9. The history of the personages mentioned, their nāmes, nicknames and titles, as well as the history of nations.
10. Sciences dealing with Qur'ānic exegesis; rules for exegesis; the categories of the scholars specializing in it; their work and its analysis; the recommended methods of exegesis, etc.
11. Sciences and arts related to its rules of calligraphy and the history of its development and rules related to its diacritics.
12. The arts and rules of reading and reciting the Qur'ān; the various methods of pronouncing the vowels and consonants; rules of etiquette while reciting.

Besides these groups of sciences and arts there are other rich veins of sciences related to the Qur'ān, primarily those concerned with the Messenger of Allāh. These include: the Prophet's life history; his traditions; his sayings; studies of the historians who reported

his sayings (*ḥadīth*); the classification of these historians with regard to their characters and more particularly their accuracy in reporting; the chains of *isnād* etc. The science of *isnād* is concerned with scrutinizing each link in the chain of successive narrators reporting the Prophet's *ḥadīth*, (his sayings and deeds), beginning with the reporter who eye-witnessed or heard the Prophet and ending with the name of the writer who recorded the event.

There are other sciences related to organizing these reported traditions into several grades which include *ṣaḥīḥ* ("authentic"), that is to say with a completely reliable chain of *isnād*. There are also the grades "good"; "weak", that is with interrupted *isnād*; "envoyed" meaning with one strong link of *isnād* missing, etc. To illustrate the meticulous care taken by the reporters on the Prophet's traditions one may refer to such an authoritive book as al-Bokhāry's *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, one of several influential treatises on the subject. In his chapter on "The sin of telling lies about the Prophet", al-Bokhāry quoted 'Ali-ibn el-Ga'd to have said: "Sho-'bah told us: 'Mansour told me: "I heard Rabi'-ibn-Ḥerash saying, 'I heard 'Ali saying, "the Prophet, peace be upon him, said 'Do not tell lies about me, as whoever lies about me will surely enter hell.'"'"'"

In the same chapter al-Bokhāry also declared, "Abul-Walīd told us: 'Sho'bah quoted to us Jami'-ibn Shaddād who quoted Amīn-ibn-'Abdullāh-ben-Az-Zobair who quoted his father to have said "I heard the Prophet, peace be upon him saying, "Whoever tells lies about me, Hell shall be his abode""'".

In the same chapter al-Bokhāry added: "Abu-Ma'mar told us: "Abdul-Wārith quoted 'Abdul-'Azīz to have said: 'Anas said, "What prevents me from telling you much is that I heard the Prophet peace be upon him saying; 'Who intentionally tells lies about me shall be domiciled in Hell'"'".

This is just an example to illustrate the extreme care taken in reporting accurately not only every word uttered by the Prophet but also the names of the witnesses who heard him and the names of those who relayed his sayings by word of mouth to successive generations, even when handed down through more than one channel.

The question may well be asked: How many of those writers or scholars who have taken pen in hand to compose books on Oriental, Arabic or Islamic studies were able first to master all the above sciences and arts related to the Qur'ān?

Chapter 4

On the Qur'ānic Textual Order

With regard to the textual orders of the verses and *Sūrahs*, we read numerous comments by Orientalists who have studied the subject to varying depths. Just how many have accepted the traditional order of the *Muṣ-ḥaf* is impossible to tell since in such a case no comment need be made. On the other hand, there are Orientalists who have criticized the order of the *Sūrahs* and verses; at times even suggesting arrangements to their own taste. Should ignorance lead to prejudice? Commentators of the Middle Ages such as Ricoldo and Vincent de Beauvais have described the Qur'ān as "fabricated, torn about and disorderly... there was no order of time by periods and kings".[1] Unfortunately, such accusations have been mechanically echoed by a few later Orientalists who, it seems, have made no effort to check their validity. A representative selection of these comments is cited in the coming few pages, their arguments are analysed and the relevant Qur'ānic verses are rendered.

The claim that the *Sūrahs* were arranged in a manner opposite to their chronological order was made by Muir, Nöldeke, Palmer, Rodwell, and more recently by Jeffery, Cragg and Kritzeck.[2]

Rodwell and Tritton have further accused Zaid-ibn-Thābit and his committee of ignoring every system in the *Sūrahs'* arrangement. They have overlooked the fact that Zaid's group were merely following the Qur'ānic textual arrangement established by the

Prophet himself. Both Orientalists have conjectured that Zaid simply placed together whatever came to hand, with "the longest and best known chapter first".[3] Kritzeck matched them in imagination and accused Zaid of inventing his own arrangement for the *Sūrahs* "with entire disregard to continuity of subject and uniformity of style," producing "a most unreadable and incongruous patchwork"[4]. An additional and still wilder accusation was that he and his committee used the Prophet's revelation only as a basis "though arranging it as they saw best and adding other material that came to them where it seemed appropriate." This particular criticism was hurled by Jeffery.[5] Surprisingly enough, not a single example was provided to substantiate such wild conjectures. Now, this "other material" — if indeed it could ever have existed outside the Orientalist's imagination — must have been one of two alternatives: either part of the same or part of a different literary style as the Qur'ānic verses. If this material were of the same style then other authors indeed could have imitated the Qur'ān. But, on the contrary, history has proved that this never took place; what is more, the challenge is still open. Alternatively, if it were of a different style this could easily have been discerned by expert linguists. Generations of capable authorities on the subject could not single out any one flaw in the Qur'ānic style. Yet, Jeffery persisted, "that all it contains is genuinely from the Prophet is fairly certain for very few passages are of doubtful authenticity," without giving a single example to substantiate such a sweeping allegation.[6]

Some writers have even gone to the extent of recklessly accusing the Prophet himself of having "designedly mixed up later with earlier revelations, not for the sake of producing that mysterious style which seems so pleasing to those who value truth least... but for the purpose of softening down some of the earlier statements".[7] How can such accusations against the concrete historical facts about every single *Sūrah* and verse be described except as the fruit of a careless lack of knowledge? There are innumerable books in Arabic and other languages on Qur'ānic exegesis where every verse is explained and analysed with regard to its grammar, syntax, historical occasion and in many other respects.[8] Had those Orientalists mentioned above studied or consulted such books, they, no doubt, would have reached drastically different conclusions.

Attempted changes in the textual order

A few Orientalists seem to have been obsessed by the notion that the *Sūrahs* should follow one another chronologically. The fact remains evident that even had their idea been feasible it would have been impossible to apply to many of the *Sūrahs* for the simple reason that they combined both earlier and later revelations. This will be explained below. Further, some commentators were uncertain as to the exact order of various *Sūrahs*. For instance, the chronological order of *Sūrah* 1 "The Opener" was thought by Muir to be 6, by Rodwell to be 8, by Nöldeke to be 48, while Jeffery excluded it from the Qur'ān altogether. More examples of such confusion are cited in Appendix II in which the textual order of the *Sūrahs* and their correct chronological order are compared with the arrangements suggested by Muir, Nöldeke, Rodwell and Jeffery. It is interesting to note that the arrangement suggested by Muir in 1860 and quoted by Hughes in 1894[9], differs in many respects from that of the same Muir as quoted by Bell in 1958.[10] The quotation by Hughes is the one included in Appendix II here. Is it not strange that although these gentlemen have followed similar lines of thought and "research", they have reached divergent conclusions? The only similarity among them is that each insisted on not accepting the order of the *Sūrahs* established by the Islamic traditions for the Islamic Book.

RODWELL'S HYPOTHESIS

It would seem that Rodwell was enthusiastic about developing a theory, any theory, to explain his invented chronological sequence of the Qur'ānic verses. Starting from the fact that many of the verses in the early revelations are short, he attempted to rearrange various *Sūrahs*. For example, on *Sūrah* 67 he commented: "Verses 8–11 wear the appearance of a late insertion on account of their length which is a character of the more advanced period."[11] However, if one looks at the Arabic text — which is surely the material to be studied, rather than any translation — one finds that these verses contain the following numbers of words: 13, 19, 12, 5

respectively. The rest of the verses of this *Sūrah* vary in length between 8 and 18 words. More importantly, verses 8–11, claimed by Rodwell as a late insertion, sound and look very closely knit with those coming before and after, the ideas flowing gracefully throughout. They are translated here:

> And for those who disbelieve in their Lord there is
> the doom of hell, a hapless journey's end.
> When they are flung therein they hear its roaring as it boils up.
> It would almost burst with rage.
> Whenever a host is flung therein the wardens thereof ask them:
> came there unto you no warner?
> They say: Yes, verily a warner came unto us; but we denied and said: God has not revealed: ye are in nought but a great error.
> And they say: Had we been wont to listen or have sense, we would not have been among the dwellers of the blaze.
> So they acknowledge their sins: but far removed (from mercy) are the dwellers in the blaze.
> Lo! Those who fear their Lord in the Unseen, theirs will be forgiveness and a great reward.
> And keep your speech secret or proclaim it, Lo! Verily He is Knower of all that is in the breasts (of men). (67:6–13)

Now, if the verses 8–11 were not revealed at the same time as the rest of the *Sūrah*, this proves the Islamic argument that the Qur'ānic verses or *Sūrahs* were not intended to follow each other in the text according to their chronological order but according to the divine plan.

Another claim of Rodwell's is concerned with *Sūrah* 51: "It is highly probable that the whole passage from verse 24 to 60 did not originally form a part of this chapter but was added at a later period, perhaps in the recension of the text under 'Othman for want of connection with what precedes."[12] This can be dismissed as wrong since verses 24 to 60 of this *Sūrah* are a natural continuation of the subject matter begun in the preceding verses (1–23). The *Sūrah* commences with an oath (1–4) and a warning that the Hereafter will definitely take place (5,6). Those who deny it are criticized (7–12). The punishment for the disbelievers and the reward for the believing doers of good are briefly described (13–19). Then, attention is drawn to Allāh's signs around us, (20–23). The verses (24–53) refer to signs in history; and how each disbelieving nation was doomed. Every one of these nations denied

their Prophet and accused him of being a wizard or a madman. Finally, the disbelievers in the Prophet's message are referred to and are warned (54–60).

Apparently Rodwell used a translation rather than the original Arabic text as a basis for his conjectures. He asserted that in *Sūrah* **74** a word *saqar* disturbs the rhyme; "it may have been inserted by a mistake of the copyist for the usual word which suits it" — without naming the "usual word" he had in mind.[13] In Arabic the verses 18–30 end in the following consecutive words:

> *qaddar* (18), *qaddar* (19), *qaddar* (20), *nathar* (21)
> *basar* (22), *istakbar* (23), *yo'thar* (24), *bashar* (21)
> *saqar* (26), *saqar* (27); *tadhar* (28), *bashar* (29), *'Ashar* (30)

The rhyming throughout is very striking. What is more, each word in its place is especially appropriate as far as the meaning is concerned.

JEFFERY'S ASSUMPTIONS

Jeffery came up with the following seriously mistaken conjecture. He dismissed *Sūrah* **1** as not belonging to the Qur'ān proper. He ignored *Sūrah* **3** and omitted it from his chronological arrangement. Jeffery then went on to claim that *Sūrah* **111** was revealed in Medina in the second year subsequent to Hijra, although, according to Islamic history this same *Sūrah* is among the earliest revelations in Mecca being revealed about ten years before Hijra[14]; its correct chronological order is **6**. Similarly, he considered *Sūrahs* **102** and **107** as Medinan revelations while they were actually Meccan. He invented his own chronological arrangement, based on a notion he conceived, probably from the Qur'ānic translation he read. For instance, he assumed *Sūrah* **101** to be succeeded in time by *Sūrahs* **99**, **82**, **81**, **53**, **84** and **100**, while the correct chronological sequence for these respective *Sūrahs*, according to Islamic tradition, is **30**, **93**, **82**, **7**, **23**, **83** and **14**.

When Jeffery decided to exclude *Sūrah* **1** from the Qur'ān he contended that, "in it man is addressing God whereas in the Qur'ān proper it is always God addressing man".[15] He is evidently mistaken in this case as shown by the following verses from *Sūrah* **2**:

God imposes not on any soul a duty beyond its scope.
For it is that which it earns [of good] and against it which it works [of evil].
Our Lord, punish us not if we forget or make a mistake.
Our Lord, do not lay on us a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us. Our Lord, impose not on us (afflictions) which we have not the strength to bear. And pardon us, and grant us protection, and have mercy on us. Thou art our Patron so grant us victory over the disbelieving people. (2:286)

In this verse, in *Sūrah* **1**, as well as in several others, the believers are guided to the best way of addressing the Deity.

According to another assumption of Jeffery's, *Sūrah* **103** is "an early Meccan fragment to which the last verse was added in Medina".[16] The *Sūrah* in point is composed of only three verses, rendered as follows:

By the declining day,
Lo! man is in a state of loss,
except those who believe and do righteous deeds,
and exhort each other to the truth
and exhort each other to endurance. (**103**: 1–3)

Reading it even in translation, one can see that Jeffery's assumption is simply not true, for the *Sūrah* sounds perfectly self-contained and integrated.

On *Sūrah* **72**, Jeffery came up with the comment, "The concluding verses are quite different in style and are apparently an odd fragment which the compiler added."[17] *Sūrah* **72** is composed of twenty-eight verses, the last seven are here translated:

Say: Lo! no one can protect me from Allāh
nor can I find any refuge beside Him.
(Mine is) but conveyance (of the truth) from Allāh and His messages; and who disobeys Allāh and His Messenger, Lo! his is the fire of hell wherein such dwell forever.
Till (the day) when they shall behold that which they are promised (they may doubt); but then they will know (for certain) who is weaker in allies and less in multitude.
Say (O Muḥammad, unto the disbelievers); I know not whether that which ye are promised is nigh, or if my Lord has set a distant term for it.

(He is) the Knower of the Unseen and reveals to no one his secret.
Save unto every messenger whom He has chosen and then He makes a guard to go before him and a guard behind him.
That He may know that they have indeed conveyed the message of their Lord.
He encompasseth all their doings and
He keeps count of everything. (72:22–28)

Simply by reading these verses we can see how mistaken Jeffery was in his assumptions.

The Islamic concept of the Hereafter will be discussed in Part II of this book.

INVENTED CRITERIA FOR MECCAN AND MEDINAN REVELATIONS

It seems that the urge to develop a theory, any theory, about the textual and chronological orders was not limited to Rodwell and Jeffery. Lammens invented a criterion about the Medinan verses. He claimed that the divine warnings of the approach of the Judgement were abandoned in the Medinan *Sūrahs*.[18] This is evidently far from true, as proved by the examples of verses cited in this and other chapters.

Those commentators who tried to invent a criterion for Meccan and Medinan *Sūrahs* other than from historical evidence simply got lost. As an example, Bell postulated: "It was only in Medina that Muhammad was interested in maintaining the morale of a community; condemnation of 'fasād', corruption, treason, is thus a mark of the Medinan origin of the passage."[19] Both his assumption and conclusion are wrong, because the Prophet condemned corruption at every stage of his mission. The word *fasād* is found in both Meccan and Medinan *Sūrahs*. The word is mentioned once in *Sūrah* 89 which is Meccan, as indicated in the Qur'ān and as admitted by Bell, Muir, Nöldeke and Grimme.

Another aspect of such scholars' thinking is exemplified by Bell's statement: "The doubtful *Sūrahs* are 98, which Muir regards as Meccan, Grimme as doubtfully so and Nöldeke as Medinan; 22 which Nöldeke classes as Medinan but with admixture of Meccan passages. The Western commentators divided the Meccan *Sūrahs*

into groups within which they do not profess that their order is strictly chronological."[20]

Obsessed, it seems, with their own notions, these writers have tried to invent criteria, which were usually invalid, in order to decide how the Qur'ānic *Sūrahs* might be chronologically arranged. Convinced of the invincibility of their arguments they overlooked the conspicuous fact that the Qur'ānic *Sūrahs* and verses were never intended to be arranged in the text according to the chronological order of their revelation.

MECCAN AND MEDINAN VERSES COMBINED

Actually, as mentioned in the last chapter, many a *Sūrah* is mixed. That is, it contains a few verses revealed in Mecca while the rest were revealed in Medina, or vice versa. Now, although such verses were revealed some years before or after the rest of the *Sūrah*, the whole once complete is perfectly knit. The development of ideas and the "rich repertory of subtle and complicated rhythms," as Arberry put it, glide with no interruption or flaw. Some examples will be discussed here, while Appendix III offers the list of many more *Sūrahs* revealed partly in Mecca and partly in Medina.

1. In *Sūrah* 9, the 129 verses came down to the Prophet in Medina — except for the last two which had been revealed in Mecca some years earlier. Here are the last 6 verses of this *Sūrah*:

> And whenever a *Sūrah* is revealed there are some of them who say: Which of you has it strengthened in faith?
> So as for those who believe it strengthens them in faith
> and they are hopeful.
> But as for those in whose hearts is a disease, it adds uncleanness to their uncleanness and they die while they are disbelievers.
> See they not that they are tried once or twice in every year, yet they repent not, nor do they mind.
> And whenever a *Sūrah* is revealed, they look at one another: Does anyone see you? Then they turn away. Allāh has turned away their hearts because they are a people who understand not.
> Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among

> yourselves; grievous to him is your suffering, full of concern for you, to the believers gentle, compassionate.
> But if they turn away, say: Allāh is sufficient for me, there is no god but He. On Him do I rely, and He is the Lord of the Mighty Throne. (9:124–129)

Here the disbelievers' response to any *Sūrah* is compared with that of those who believe. As for the people whose hearts are diseased by lack of faith, their belief even decreases when they hear a *Sūrah* and they turn away because of their lack of understanding (124–127). Then the believers are addressed (128), and the messenger whom God has sent from among them is described. Finally, the Prophet himself is comforted: "If the faithless turn away from the message, rely on Allāh, He is the Lord of the mighty throne" (129).

Unable to discern the comprehensive plan behind these verses a writer like Lammens, in a snide criticism, has declared them to be "Medinese fragments which have strayed into the Mekkan Suras".[21]

2. The 52 verses of *Sūrah* **14** were all revealed in Mecca, with the exception of verses 28, 29 and 30 which came down in Medina years later. Verses 24 to 31 are interpreted as follows:

> Seest thou not how Allāh coins a similitude. A goodly saying as a goodly tree, its root set firm, its branches reaching into heaven.
> Giving its fruit at every season by permission of its Lord?
> Allāh coins the similitudes for mankind in order that they may reflect.
> And the similitude of a corrupt saying is as a corrupt tree, uprooted from upon the earth, possessing no stability.
> Allāh confirms those who believe by a firm saying in the life of the world and in the Hereafter, and Allāh sends wrong-doers astray. And Allāh does what He will.
> Hast thou not seen those who exchanged the bounty of Allāh with thanklessness, and led their people down to the Abode of ruin?
> Hell, they are exposed thereto, a hapless end.
> And they set up rivals to Allāh that they may mislead (men) from His way. Say: Enjoy life (while ye may) for lo! Your journey's end will be the Fire.

> Tell My servants who believe to establish worship and spend of that which We have given them, secretly and in public before a day comes wherein there will be neither trafficking nor befriending. (**14**: 24–31)

Here the verses discuss a parable; a good word is like a good lofty tree, firmly rooted and bearing abundant fruit in all seasons whereas a bad word is like a rotten tree that could easily fall (26). Thence, the believers and the wrong doers are mentioned — particularly those thankless people who have exchanged the grace of Allāh for loss (28, 29). They have turned away from Allāh and His way; whatever temporary joy they may have in this world can only be little since Hell will be their doom (30). Finally, the Messenger is ordered to tell Allāh's servants that He wants them to worship Him, and spend in charity of what He has granted them before the day comes when every soul will be judged for its own work, nothing will be available in exchange or as a friendly gift among people (31).

3. *Sūrah* **15** was revealed in Mecca — all 99 verses being revealed there with the exception of verse 87 which is of Medinan origin, considerably later. Verses 85 to 89 are here interpreted:

> And We created not the heavens and the earth and what is between them save with truth; and the Hour is surely coming, so pardon with kindly forgiveness.
> Surely thy Lord, He is the All- Creator, the All- Knower.
> And certainly We have given thee seven oft-repeated (verses) and the grand Qur'ān.
> Stretch not thine eyes to what We have given certain classes of them to enjoy, and grieve not for them, and make thyself gentle to the believers.
> And say: I am indeed the manifest warner. (**15**: 85–89).

The Prophet is being addressed; he is urged to reflect upon Allāh's creation around him in the heavens and earth. Everything was created with truth, every sign points to the reality of the Hereafter (85). Then Allāh, the Creator, the Knower (86) reminds him of his grace and of the bestowal of His great favour (87). He asks the Prophet to be kind to the believers, not to grieve for those who turn away from the message to follow their limited worldly enjoyment (88). He is instructed to plainly warn them (89).

LINKS BETWEEN CONSECUTIVE SŪRAHS

One more piece of evidence for the fact that the textual order of the Qur'ān is divine, and not random, can be furnished by a study of the links between each two consecutive *Sūrahs* in the *Muṣ-ḥaf.* A few examples would illustrate this point;

1. *Sūrahs* 1 and 2: The former ends in a supplication to God that He may "guide us to the straight path" (1:6); whereas the latter starts by indicating the guidance. Its second verse is rendered thus:

> This is the Book whereof there is no doubt, a guidance unto the pious. (2:2).

So, this verse gives a divine answer to man's supplication at the end of the first *Sūrah.*

2. In *Sūrahs* 8 and 9, the last two verses in the former describe the co-operative and brotherly behaviour of the believers and give the good tidings of the generous divine reward prepared for them. *Sūrah* 9 commences with a warning to the disbelievers, polytheists and hypocrites. Thus, together these present an impressive and instructive contrast for the reader who believes, to induce him to follow the right path and to evade the wrong.

3. *Sūrahs* 93 and 94, both are addressed to the Prophet. The former *Sūrah* comforts and tells him;

> Thy Lord hath not foresaken thee nor doth He hate thee.
> Verily the later period will be better for thee than the former. (93: 1–2)

He is then reminded of God's favours and blessings so far bestowed on him; protecting him when he was an orphan, guiding him when he was at loss and enriching him after being in want (93: 6–8). The *Sūrah* ends by enjoining the Prophet not to oppress the orphan, not to chide the beggar, but to proclaim the Lord's favours (93: 9–11).

In continuation, the subsequent *Sūrah* (94) starts by reminding the Prophet of some of the Lord's favours:

Have We not expanded for thee thy breast,
And removed from thee thy burden which weighed down thy back
And exalted for thee thy mention. (94: 1–3)

The bond between the two *Sūrahs* is clearly strong.

From these examples and others, even from each single page of the Qur'ān it should be clear that this is not an ordinary book of history in which each sentence should follow the preceding one chronologically.

It should by now be abundantly clear that the Orientalists quoted above have merely consumed vast amounts of time and energy in trying to rearrange the Qur'ānic verses into any pattern different from their traditional textual order. Had these Orientalists only directed their attention to the magnificent subject matter, the wealth of noble ideas contained in the sacred text, how much more fruitful would have been the results of all their painstaking efforts.

Chapter 5

English Translations of the Qur'ān

According to the Oxford Dictionary[1], "translation" means expressing the sense of a word, sentence, or book in another language. Those who have tried to translate the Qur'ān from its Arabic original have found it impossible to express the same wealth of ideas with a limited number of words in the new language. Indeed, some writers, recognizing this extreme difficulty, have refrained from calling their works "translation". Pickthall for instance, called his rendering *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, while Arberry[2] entitled his, *The Qur'an Interpreted*. Both have made their translations directly from Arabic. Needless to say, in the case of a second or third hand translation such as from Arabic into Latin or French and thence into English, the result is bound to be still further away from the original. Despite the evident inaccuracy of the word "translation" it remains the most convenient one and will therefore be used throughout this chapter.

Historical note

The first translation of the Qur'ān into a Western language was made into Latin. It was carried out by Robertus Rotenesis and Hermannus Dalmata in 1143 but was not published until 1543. In

1647 André du Ryer who was the French Consul in Egypt for some years translated it into French. This translation was later described by Sale as having mistakes in every page besides frequent transpositions, omissions and additions. This French version was translated into English by Alexander Ross in 1688. This was the first English version of the Qur'ān and was described by Savary as "despicable"; Sale described it as a very bad one, no better than its French origin. Many later English translations were based on a Latin version by Father Ludovic Maracci in 1698.[3] Maracci was the confessor of Pope Innocent XI and was taught Arabic by a Turk.

One of the most famous English translations was by George Sale in 1734, who included a detailed explanatory discourse. Sale depended largely on Maracci's Latin version.[4] This was because he could not fully master the Arabic language. His tutor was an Italian named Dadichi, the king's interpreter at the time. Although Voltaire asserted that Sale had spent "five and twenty years in Arabia where he had acquired a profound knowledge of the Arabic language and customs", this was ruled out in his biography by the historian R.A. Davenport as being "opposed by the stubborn evidence of dates and facts." Consequently it was "an obvious impossibility and must be dismissed to take its place among those fictions by which biographers have often been encumbered and disgraced".[5]

Undeniably Sale's translation of the Qur'ān contains many faults, each one indicating that he could not have fully grasped the Arabic language; examples will be given later in this chapter. But despite its many inaccuracies, Sale's version has gone through some thirty editions; it was retranslated into Dutch in 1742, German in 1764, French in 1750, Russian in 1792, Swedish in 1814, and into Bulgarian in 1902.[6]

Subsequently, many other attempts to translate the Qur'ān into English have been published by English writers who largely depended on Sale's or other non-Arabic versions. Rodwell's rendering appeared in 1861, Palmer's in 1880, Bell's in 1939 and Dawood's in 1956. Professor Arberry's translation of the original Arabic was published in 1955 and was described by Watt, Williams and others as of the "greatest literary distinction". The one by Dawood was considered by Watt as very simple and "always having an intelligible meaning".[7]

A number of translations have also been made by born Muslims, among them 'Abdul-Hakīm Khān in 1905, Mirza abul-Fazl in 1911, Mohammed 'Ali in 1916 and 'Abdullāh Yusuf 'Ali in 1938. There is another translation published in 1930 by a Western scholar who accepted Islam; he is Marmaduke Pickthall.

Assessment of English translations

To be realistic one should never expect any translation to convey in full the ideas expressed in the Arabic original. To quote Williams on the subject: "No translation, however faithful to the meaning has ever been successful."[8] Anyone who has read it in the original is forced to admit this statement is justified. Arabic, when expertly used is a remarkably terse, rich and forceful language, and the Arabic of the Qur'ān is by turns striking, soaring, vivid, terrible, tender and breathtaking. In Professor Gibb's words, "No man has ever played on that deep-toned instrument with such power, such boldness and such range of emotional effects."[9] Bodley declared: "To anyone who has not heard the sonorous majesty of an Arab reciting the Qur'ān, it is impossible to convey what the Book lacks in English, French or German."[10] However, certain translations were so well done that they could move readers sincerely searching for the truth and illumination even to the extent of accepting the faith of Islam.

Comparing any translation with the original Arabic is like comparing a thumbnail sketch with the natural view of a splendid landscape rich in colour, light and shade, and sonorous in melody. The Arabic vocabulary as used in the Qur'ān conveys a wealth of ideas with various subtle shades and colours impossible to express in full with a finite number of words in any other language.

To illustrate this point let us look at the two Arabic words *istā'a* and *istaṭā'a*. Both words were translated interchangeably as "could" or "was able to" by Sale, Muḥammad 'Ali, Pickthall, Rodwell and others, all of whom overlooked the delicate difference in meaning between the two words. *Istā'a* is only used for relatively easy actions such as climbing a hill, whereas *istaṭā'a* is used for a more difficult task such as boring a tunnel through the hill.

Another example is related to the attributes of Allāh; he is *Khā-*

liq (the Creator who creates things from nothing), *Khallāq* (who creates everything), *Fāṭir* (the original Creator of things, — without a previous example to imitate), Al-Badi' (who creates and perfects things without previous examples), Al-Bāri' (who creates and gives substance). All these names are translated interchangeably as the "Creator"[11], the "Maker"[12], the "Originator"[13], or the "Producer"[14]. The Arabic words *malik*, *mālik* and *malīk* are slightly different from one another in writing and meaning. *Malik* is "king", whereas *mālik* is the "maker and owner" and *mālik* is the "supreme sovereign". Sale and Rodwell interpreted them all as "king", whereas *mālik* was interpreted as "owner" by Pickthall and as "lord" by 'Ali.

Again, the word *qādir* means capəble, whereas *qadīr* and *moqtadir* are two different superlative forms with the same root. *Moqtadir* was construed by Sale as "most potent", by Rodwell as "potent" and by Pickthall as "mighty". The closest rendering could be "most capable of great things". 'Ali rendered the word as "powerful" while he rendered *qadīr* as "possessor of power". The latter word was interpreted by Sale as "almighty", and by Pickthall as "able"; whereas the closest expression would be "infinitely capable".

More often than not a single word can hardly be adequately translated by less than a long phrase. For instance, the word *nuṭfah* was rendered by Bucaille as "a small quantity of liquid" and he regretted not having "the terms which are strictly appropriate". Rendering the adjective *makīn* as a "firmly established lodging" he described it as "hardly translatable".[15] The subtle difference between *mata* and *ayyāna* could hardly be discerned in any translation the author ever read. Although both mean the interrogative "when" the word *ayyāna* implies a denial that the event in question will ever take place.

Mistaken English translations

By this it is meant that the original sense of the word or verse was not properly expressed. This could have resulted for several reasons: (1) nescience of the Arabic word's exact meaning: (2) knowing only one shade of the meaning; (3) confusion be-

tween different Arabic words; (4) limited knowledge of Arabic eked out with figments of imagination; (5) mistaking Arabic for Hebrew or Syriac; (6) some confusion with Hebrew traditions.

1 NESCIENCE OF THE ARABIC WORD'S EXACT MEANING

In translating 18:26 Palmer's version is[16], "He can see and hear"; whereas Sale's is, "Do thou make Him to see and to hear"[17] and Rodwell's is, "Look thou and hearken to Him alone".[18] Pickthall renders it, "How clear of sight is He and keen of hearing," which is the only one that can be described as nearest to the correct rendering.

In attempting to construe the words in 64:9, Palmer wrote, "that is the day of cheating".[19] He tried to elaborate further: "i.e. both the righteous and wicked will disappoint each other by reversing their positions, the wicked being punished while the righteous are in bliss." But it is perfectly well known from the Qur'ān that the righteous and wicked are never going to "reverse positions" nor are the righteous going to be "disappointed" on the Day of Judgement. Actually, the Arabic word *attaghābon* does not mean "cheating". It means taking each other to judgement and suing each other. Furthermore, this specific verse does not say exactly where the righteous and wicked are as claimed by the Orientalist.

In trying to translate 56:75, Sale wrote[20] "Moreover, I swear by the setting of the stars", but *fala* does not mean "moreover". It means "so I do not". *Mawāqi'-an-nujūm* does not signify the actual setting of the stars but rather the places where the stars are or the places where the stars are going to fall.[21]

Jeffery came to a very wrong set of conclusions from a similar mistake. His attempt to translate 75:34–35 reads, "Nearer to thee, ever nearer to the Hour; then nearer to thee still nearer." He goes on to say, "This is merely an attempt to link these two out-of-place verses with what goes before and what goes after."[22] Jeffery has missed the point; the verses preceding these describe the conditions of the mischievous and disbelievers, calling the attention of the reader to reflect on the Hereafter just described and on the fol-

lowing verses which provide additional proof that Judgement is as definite as the everyday world we see around us. The whole group of verses as correctly interpreted should actually read:

> For he neither trusted nor prayed.
> But he denied and rebelled.
> Then went he to his folk with glee.
> Nearer unto thee and nearer.
> Again nearer unto thee and nearer.
> Thinketh man that he is to be left aimless?
> Was he not a drop of fluid which gushed forth?
> Then he became a clot (of blood) then Allāh shaped and fashioned,
> And made of him a pair, the male and female.
> Is not He (Who does so) Able to bring the dead to life? (75:31–40)

In a recent book, Rodinson in some of his misconceptions, interpreted 53:4 thus:

"This is none other than a suggestion suggested" instead of:

"This is none other than a revelation revealed" and 36:69 as:

"We have not taught him poetry nor does it beseem it" rather than:

"We have not taught him poetry nor should he (learn it)" and the verse 52:43:

"Have they any god but Allāh?

How far is Allāh above those they associate with Him" in lieu of:

"Allāh is highly exalted above those they associate with Him."[23] He seems to have been misinformed to the extent of fabricating a passage that is alien to the Qur'ān.[24]

2 AWARENESS OF ONLY ONE SHADE OF MEANING

Lane's translation of 2:93 illustrates this point: "They were made to drink down the calf into their hearts."[25] Now, the verse does not actually say anything about drinking. The word *oshribo* literally means that their hearts were "filled" or "soaked" with the love of the calf. But Lane insisted, "The word here rendered (hearts) often signifies (stomachs)," which is wrong because "sto-

machs" in Arabic is *boṭōn*. Adamant in his insistence Lane continued: "Here the narrative agrees with the Mosaic account: 'for he [Moses] took the calf they had made and burnt it in the fire and ground it to powder and strewed it upon the water and made the children of Israel to drink it' (Exod. 32:20)." As it happens, this narrative of Exodus does not feature at all in this small Qur'ānic verse.

Or, if we take Sale's translation of 16:19: "... and thrown on the earth mountains firmly rooted lest it should move with you".[26] In Arabic *rawāsiya fil-'arḍ* means "firm heavy parts *in* the earth" not "*on* the earth" while *tamīda* signifies "its motion becomes unbalanced," which is basically different from Sale's version. He further maintained: "The word *rawāsiya* seems properly to express the Hebrew word *mechanim*, that is foundations, and therefore it is thought the Qur'ān has here translated the passage of Psalm (4:5); "He laid the foundations of the earth that it should not be moved forever," which is basically different from the meaning of the verse.

In his rendering of 22:65 Palmer seems to have been aware of only one shade of meaning; "He holds the sky from falling on the earth save at His bidding, verily God to men is Gracious, Merciful."[27] This is correct so far, but then he goes on to say: "The words of the text might also be rendered: 'withhold the rain from falling on the earth...' although the commentators do not seem to notice this sense." In fact, the words of the text could not be rendered "withhold the rain from falling," because the Arabic word in question is *al-samā'* which never signifies the rain. It means heaven, the sky, or places above, for example the ceiling. Words for the rain are *al-ghaith* or *al-matar*. Rain is also sometimes expressed as "water from the sky", but never just by the word "sky". The verse in question actually connotes; He holds the sky, meaning the heavenly bodies from falling on the earth save at His bidding, verily this is a manifestation of God's Mercy and Graciousness to man.

A similar instance is Palmer's comment on 20:15.

> Lo! the Hour is surely coming, I almost conceal it, that every soul may be recompensed for that which it strives.

After giving a corr:ct translation Palmer added, "This may also be rendered 'I almost conceal it from Myself'," which is simply incredible when one considers who is speaking here.

Trying to translate 17:60, Jeffery made similar mistakes: "Verily thy Lord is round about the people," gives rise to his questioning, "and what the reference to the Lord being round about His people is we do not know".[28] What Jeffery understood *aḥāṭa* to signify as "round about" in the original Arabic actually means "encompassed", i.e. Allāh has full control over His creatures and none of them can evade His judgement.[29] Similarly, 89:10, "*Phir'aon dhil'awtād*", which means "Pharoah of the bulwarks", was not at all clear to Jeffery who confessed: "What is meant by 'Pharoah Lord of the stakes or tent pegs' is unknown."[30]

Had he realized it, the pharoahs had built huge pyramids like mountains, and had tombs and temples carved in mountains. Further, *'awtād* is often used in the Qur'ān to mean "mountains". For example, in 78:6–7 we read:

> Have We not made the earth an expanse and the mountains bulwarks?

3 CONFUSION BETWEEN DIFFERENT ARABIC WORDS

In every language there are words which may sound nearly identical to each other although their meanings are drastically different. Such words can easily be confused by inexperienced linguists. This has occurred in several attempts to translate the Qur'ān. For example, Jeffery became confused between *qadr* and *qadar*. He maintained, "*qadr* means power but is the technical Muslim word for the decree which pre-determines everything, whether for good or evil".[31] This is hardly correct. *Qadr* is not quite "power" so much as "value" or "magnitude". "Power" in Arabic is *qodrah.* Also, he confused *qadr* with *qadar*, "fate".

Another typical mistake by Jeffery relates to the word *taqwim* (95:4). He first put it as *taqwin* and stated that it meant "symmetry".[32] In fact there is no word *taqwin*, the nearest word to it being *takwīn*, "formation". In fact, *taqwīm* means "straightening". Similarly, his confusion between *saraban*, and *sarāb*. *Saraban* could possibly mean "freely" but *sarāb* is a water conduit or "mirage".[33]

Menezes[34] mistakenly translated "Abu-Bakr" — the nick-name of one of the Prophet's friends and the first man to believe in

him — as father of the Virgin. But the Arabic word for virgin is *bikr*, whereas *bakr* is the Arabic word for earliness.

In 39:75 the word *ḥāffina* ("thronging") was confused by Savary[35] with *ḥāfin* ("barefooted"). The correct translation of the verse is: "And you see the angels thronging around the Throne hymning the praise of their Lord."[36]

4 LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF ARABIC EKED OUT WITH FIGMENTS OF IMAGINATION

Sale, understanding the word *akha* to literally mean "brother", wrongly attacked the Qur'ān: "The Qur'ān confounds Mary the mother of Jesus with Mary or Miriam, a sister of Moses and Aaron which is an intolerable anachronism... Also there is about 1800 years between Amran, the father of Moses and Amran the father of the Virgin Mary."[37] Sale was unable to perceive that although *akha* literally means "brother" it can very well also mean "related to". Sale's accusation here is based on the verse, "O Sister of Aaron..." (19:28), in which the Jews, because they knew the Virgin Mary to be related to Aaron and thus of a noble family, accused her when they saw her carrying the infant Jesus and reproached her for having committed so shameful a crime.

A few other Orientalists copied Sale's misconception; clearly they were unaware that the word *akha* is often used in the Qur'ān not to mean "blood brother" but "related to", i.e. of the same nation or tribe. Surely, in his translation of the whole Book he should have noted these verses.

> And unto (the tribe of) 'Aad (We sent) their brother Hūd... (11:50)

> And unto (the tribe of) Thamūd (We sent) their brother Ṣālih... (11:61)

There are many other equally mistaken translations. Among the most striking examples is Bell's notion that the "Qur'ān" was different from the "*Furqān*", the "*Mathānī*" and the "Book".[38] In fact, the "Qur'ān", the "*Kitāb*" and the "*Furqān*" are simply three of the fifty-five names of the same book, as was explained in the Introduction to this book.

Attempting to prove his point Bell quoted several verses. The result merely demonstrated just how he became confused. Here are two of his translations:[39]

> Alif, Lām, Ra; these are verses of the Book and a manifest Qur'an (recitation)... (15:1)

> The month of Ramadhan in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for mankind, and clear proofs of the guidance, and the criterion Furqan... (2:185)

This misinterpretation, which was almost mechanically echoed very recently by Burton[40], may sound like someone who reads an appraisal of a Mr X in which he is described as "a clever business-man, a sensitive artist and a kind father," and then failing to understand the appraisal and imagining Mr X to be three separate people. The word *furqān* connotes a criterion for discrimination or separation between good and evil, which is one of the names of the Qur'ān. It is sometimes used to convey just that, as in this verse:

> O You who believe, if you keep your duty to Allāh, He will give you discrimination (between right and wrong). (8:29)

Showing a lack of appreciation for the Qur'ānic style, Bell jumped to the wrong conclusion that some verses were inserted where they do not belong.[41] For example, he claimed: "Sūrah 5, verse 46 begins with a phrase '*Sama'ūna-lil-kadhib*' [heedful to falsehood], which is entirely out of connection. The same phrase occurs in verse 45 and we can quite well replace it and what follows of verse 45 by verse 46."

In order to judge Bell's statement, let us first read the verses concerned. To begin with, his verse numbers are incorrect, the ones he described are actually verses 41 and 42 as here shown:

> O Messenger, let them not grieve you who vie one with another in the race to disbelief of such as say with their mouths, We believe but their hearts believe not, and of the Jews: listeners for falsehood [*Sama'ūna-lil-kadhib*] listeners on behalf of other folk who come not unto you, changing words from their context and saying: If this be given unto you receive it but if this be not given unto you, then beware. He whom Allāh dooms unto sin, you (by your efforts) will avail him not against Allāh. Those are they for whom the Will of Allāh is that He cleanses not their

> hearts. Theirs in this world is disgrace, and in the Hereafter an awful doom. Listeners for falsehood [*Sama'ūna-lil-kadhib*], greedy for illicit gain. If then they have recourse unto you [Muḥammad] judge between them or disclaim jurisdiction. If you disclaim jurisdiction then they cannot harm you at all. But if you judge, judge between them with equity. Lo! Allāh loves the equitable. (5:41–42)

It is quite evident from this quotation that the two verses complement each other and neither of them actually "replaces" the other. It would seem that reading the phrase "*Sama'ūna-lil-kadhib*" twice in the two verses caused Bell to rush to this mistaken conclusion. For those who are well versed in the language and appreciate its beauty this is only one example where the repetition of a phrase emphasizes the meaning and adds to the elegance of the Arabic style.

Scanty knowledge of classical Arabic would deprive anyone from appreciating the different shades of meaning rendered by the occasionally slightly different declensions of Arabic words. Another example of a critic with such limitations is R. Levy who alleged: "The earth itself is constantly spoken of as having been stretched out at creation or spread out as a carpet... whence it may be inferred that the Prophet conceived of it as flat."[42] And in an attempt to prove his point he quoted the verses

> Have We not made the earth an expanse, and the mountains bulwarks? (78:6–7)

An "expanse" here is explained in the exegesis as being like a "resting place"[43]; the earth's curvature being appropriate for life. Levy continued his misconception and rendered these verses as:

> Did We not set out the earth a flat expanse and set thereon mountains as tent pegs.

And for the verse;

> And the sun runs on unto a resting place for it. That is the measure of the Mighty, the Wise. (36:38)

Levy's version was "The sun journeys every day to an abode determined for its rest," He then accused the Muslims of having wrong conceptions about the universe. But the Qur'ān does not say "every day".

Levy interpreted "And We have placed in the earth firm mountains lest it quake with them" (21:31) as:

> On the earth the mountains were cast down to act as tent pegs in order to hold it in position and prevent its movement presumably upon the primeval water.[44]

Concerning the heavens, Jeffery seems to have confused what he had read in Oriental fiction with his translation of the Qur'ānic verse:

> And We have created above you seven paths, and We are never unmindful of creation (23:17)

Jeffery assumed the verse to connote: "We have built seven heavenly vaults." Here his translation ends and he proceeds to comment: "These are not the seven Ptolemic heavenly spheres but seven domes one above the other set like convex bowls, on the disc-like earth and the circumambient ocean which they hold in place."[45]

This is how some renderings of the Qur'ān were eked out by figments of the translators' imagination.

5 MISTAKING ARABIC FOR HEBREW OR SYRIAC

Some commentators had preconceived ideas before studying or even reading the Qur'ān. If they had decided that a particular word was Syriac or Hebrew, they thus assigned to it an incorrect meaning. However, the words are Arabic, and their significances are different from those with which the commentators have tagged them. The Arabic meanings are naturally the ones in harmony with the whole. To illustrate this point: von Grunebaum imagined the word *qur'ān* itself to be the Syriac *qeryana* denoting "lectionary", which is, according to the Oxford Dictionary, "a book containing portions of scripture appointed to be read at divine service."

Usually a word that is borrowed from another language does not readily lend itself to declensions nor does it readily become too deeply rooted in the new language. The word *qur'ān* however, has many declensions: *qara'a* ("he read"), *yaqra'o* ("he reads"),

aqra'o ("I read"), *naqra'o* ("we read"). etc.; *qāri'* ("reader"), *qirā'aton* ("reading"), *qur'ān* ("the Book that is so often read").

In a similar way, Watt described the word *rujz* ("pollution") as representing the Syriac *rugza* meaning "wrath" — relating to the wrath to come[46], which is far fetched. Let us read the verse containing the word:

> O you enwrapped in your cloak! Arise and warn. Your Lord glorify. Your rainment purify, pollution shun. (74:1)

Another case is the word *furqān* which was claimed to be the Syriac word *perqana* denoting "salvation".[47]

Actually, *furqān* is a conjugation of the Arabic verb *faraqa* ("he separated") and *farq* ("difference"). This meaning is easily understood from the verses where *furqān* is mentioned, as the guide for separating or discriminating good from evil. Not one of these verses (eg. 8:41; 35:1) containing the word implies the Syriac connotation suggested.

Gibb[48] claimed that at one time hanyfism was used to signify the doctrine preached by Muḥammad and was only later replaced by Islam. He also claimed the word *hanyf* to be the Syriac word *hampa* meaning "heathen". Now, according to the Oxford Dictionary a heathen is "an unenlightened person, a person who is neither Christian, Jew nor Muḥammadan." This is certainly not what is meant by *hanyf* in Arabic and particularly in the Qur'ān where it denotes one by nature upright.[49]

> Lo! I have turned my face towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth, as Hanyf, one by nature upright and I am not of the idolators. (6:80)

> And set thy purpose resolutely for religion as Hanyf, one by nature upright, and be not of those who ascribe partners (to God). (10:105)

Hanyf has continuously been used as a description of the devout Muslim in his submission to Allāh. In Arabic *hanyf* denotes one who is inclined to the way of Allāh and firmly upholds the faith — basically different from the Syriac "unenlightened". This point will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Guillaume, more under the influence of his studies of Hebrew and Syriac than his knowledge of Arabic, claimed: "Many words in the Qur'an cannot be explained from Arabic and must be traced

back to their sources in Hebrew or Syriac before they can be made to yield a meaning."[50] Not a single example was furnished to support his assumption. It may be true that some commentators, who were neither born Arabs nor well versed in Arabic, were not completely familiar with a few words in the Qur'ān, but this should not necessarily mean that such words were either Hebrew or Syriac.

To assume that all Muḥammad's hearers were familiar with Hebrew and Syriac because they were familiar with Jews and Christians is somewhat far fetched. It would be more logical to say that with languages of nations who have been neighbours for so many generations there are bound to be a few words common to both vocabularies. It would thus be correct to state that such words belong to both languages. This can easily be seen now between English and French, and the languages in Germany and in the Nordic countries. The same is also true for many Eastern European languages.

Sir Thomas Arnold and Guilliaume's comment is appropriate here: "Indeed no serious student of the Old Testament can afford to dispense with a first hand knowledge of Arabic";[51] to say nothing of a student of the Qur'ān.

6 SOME CONFUSION WITH HEBREW TRADITIONS

The Qur'ānic verses are very clear and easy to understand when read in Arabic with their words given their proper and direct meanings. But certain Orientalists, under the influence of their Hebrew studies, have tried hard to twist the meaning of specific words when these sounded closer to the Hebrew. Consequently verses containing such words come to receive very strange interpretations. Such writers thought it best to adopt fantastic notions in attempts to prove their postulates. Three striking examples follow.

> He it is Who sent down peace of reassurance into the hearts of the believers so that they might add faith unto their faith (48:4)

Here "peace of reassurance" comes from the Arabic *sakīnah* but Jeffery insisted on confusing it with the Jewish *shekinah*.[52] The Heb-

rew word *shekinah*, describes the "invisible glory of Jehovah (principal name of God) resting over His mercy-seat." But the Arabic word *sakīnah* cannot be assumed to be the Hebrew *shekinah* for the fundamental reason that the Jewish concept of God "resting" is quite unacceptable in Islam; it is categorically different from the Qur'ānic concept of God, as will be explained in Part II of this book.

How much clearer and more straightforward the verse sounds when the proper Arabic meaning is assigned to the word in question. Actually, *sakīnah* conveys spiritual rest, peace of reassurance, tranquility — the opposite of anxiety. From the same root comes the word *sakana* ("it rested and became still").

With Him are the clues of the unseen (6:59)

Palmer, confusing the two Arabic words *mafātih* and *mafatih* inferred, "the allusion is obvious to the Rabbinical tradition of the three keys in the hands of God".[53] Again, the concept of God having three keys in His hands is totally un-Islamic. The verse in point refers to neither numbers nor hands.

O you enwrapped in your cloak, arise and warn. (74:1)

Here Watt commented: "He [Muḥammad] may have put on a mantle to protect himself as in the old Semitic fear of the Divine as of something dangerous . . . It is also possible however, that the mantle may have been put on to induce revelations."[54] This whole assumption of Watt's is based on his rendering the Arabic word *al-moddaththir* in the verse cited above as "the enmantled". Its correct translation is "the enwrapped". Further, this verse relates to an event after the Prophet had received his first call. He was dazzled, felt cold, rushed to his house where he asked his wife and children to wrap him up in his cloak. Subsequent to this he received the revelation under discussion.

According to Islam, one protects oneself from Allāh's punishment not by putting on a mantle or shawl but by good behaviour and evading sins. Otherwise nothing can protect a persistent wrongdoer from His wrath except sincere repentance, humbly asking His forgiveness and resolving to lead a righteous life in future. The statement, "the mantle may have been put on to induce revelations" is again incorrect because a revelation is a message received from Allāh. It is up to Him alone to send it to His servant. No man, mantle nor anything else can induce it.

A most striking example of where Qur'ānic studies fall under the full influence of Hebrew Tradition is shown by a recent attempt to classify the Qur'ānic exegesis as either halakhic, masoretic or haggadic.[55] It was bound to be in vain because these typically Hebrew studies are completely alien to the Qur'ān.

From the above we have noted how difficult it can be for some writers to interpret the Qur'ān properly, either because their limited knowledge of Arabic has caused confusion with other languages or because their background in Hebrew or other Oriental studies has proved too overwhelming for them. It may be understandable for a scholar of Hebrew to imbue his writings on the Qur'ān with biblical undertones, even if the irrelevance is obvious. It may also be appreciated how much distortion of the ideas expressed by a text can take place when it is translated from its original language and thence into a second, a third or a fourth. The same goes for the theories developed by Orientalists on the basis of second- or third-hand knowledge about the subject they are tackling.

It is distressing to realize how many readers have been misinformed, how many students of comparative religion given the wrong concepts and how many in search of the truth about the Qur'ān have been misguided by such Orientalists' writings.

In this chapter we have briefly reviewed several types of mistakes in the English translation of the Book. In the next we propose to discuss in some detail a number of the Orientalists' conclusions based on their misinterpretations.

Chapter 6

Judgements Based on Mistaken Interpretations

More than one writer has claimed that certain names of Allāh were originally adopted in Islam but were then later dropped. Some commentators have also asserted changes in the name of the faith itself. Others have even imagined polytheism and intermediaries to be present in Islam, a most incredible assertion considering the basis of Islamic teachings has always been founded on immaculate monotheism. A few writers have also alleged the existence of contradictions in the Qur'ān. Let us discuss each of these in turn.

The Names of Allāh

The Prophet has been accused of introducing the word *Ar-Raḥmān* ("the Compassionate") which he used for a time almost as a proper name for Allāh. However, this seems "to have led to difficulty and as such it was soon dropped".[1] To this, Tritton added, "it looks as if Muḥammad had tried to make it [this name] popular with his followers, had failed and therefore dropped it".[2] But these serious accusations can easily be ruled out when looking knowledgeably into any copy of the *Muṣ-ḥaf.*

The phrase "*Bismillahir-Raḥmān-ir-Raḥīm*" ("In the name of

God, the Compassionate, the Merciful") occurs at the beginning of each of 113 *Sūrahs*. It is well known that this phrase containing the name of God (*Ar-Raḥmān*) is said by all sincere Muslims at the commencement of every worthwhile action or saying. Furthermore, one of the celebrated *Sūrahs* is entitled "*Ar-Raḥmān*" (*Sūrah* 55). "Allāh" and "Ar-Raḥmān" are two of the names of God as illustrated in this verse:

> Say, call Allāh or call Ar-Raḥmān (the Compassionate) whichever (name) you call, as to Him are the most exalted names. (17:110)

Bell in a similar confused state on the subject declared concerning the Prophet: "He uses 'Rabb', then he uses 'Allāh', but rather hesitatingly, either because it was not proper Arabic or because it was combined in beliefs in subordinate deities."[3] The truth is that both "Rabb" ("Lord") and "Allāh" ("God") have been known in Arabic since long before Islam and both are in the Qur'ān. So "Allāh" certainly did not replace "Rabb". The opening verse of the first *Sūrah* reads:

> Praise be to Allāh [God], the Lord [Rabb] of the worlds... (1:1)

It follows that the imagined hesitation between "Rabb" and "Allāh" is incorrect because each of the two words has its appropriate usage, as seen from the verse just cited. Neither word can replace the other. In classical Arabic, the language of the sacred Book, and before, the term the "Lord of the worlds" signifies the creator of the universes, who brought them into existence and sustains them.

Further, if a disbeliever happens to claim another being as his rabb or lord this is surely no excuse for believers to hover between using "Rabb" and "Allāh" as names for their Lord "rather hesitatingly". Proof that "Ar-Raḥmān", "Allāh" and "Rabb" are valid and properly used in the Qur'ān is furnished by the following verse:

> Thus We send you (O Muḥammad) unto a nation before whom other nations have passed away, that you may recite unto them that which We have revealed to you, while they are disbelievers in the Compassionate [Ar-Raḥmān]. Say, He is my Lord [Rabb], there is no God save He [*La-Ilāha Illa Howa*]. In Him do I put my trust and unto Him is my recourse. (13:30)

Islam and Hanyfism

The Arabic word *ḥanyf* has been mixed up by some critics with the Syriac *ḥampa*, as was discussed in the previous chapter. Now the Orientalists' assumption that Hanyfism was an independent religion will be looked into. It was claimed that the Prophet "started by imitating Abraham whose religion was called 'hanyf' and by using some books which he thought were authentic... to have discovered these books to be a recent forgery; hence the title 'hanyf' was soon dropped and exchanged for that of 'Muslim'."[4]

To this Menezes and Watt added that "Hanyfism" used to be applied by Jews and Christians to mean pagan or followers of the Hellenized and philosophical form of the old Syro-Arabic religion.[5]

Looking into the Qur'ān it becomes evident that there was in fact no religion on its own called Hanyfism. Both titles of "Hanyf" and "Muslim" were accepted as applying equally to Noah, Abraham, Muḥammad, to all the prophets of God, as well as to their faithful followers. Both words are Arabic. *Ḥanyf* is an adjective denoting leaning towards the right away from the wrong — used almost exclusively to connote a devoted clinging to Allāh's faith and a rejection of other beliefs.[6] Thus Abraham was [*ḥanyf li-llāh*] "upright" and devoted to Allāh. Also, *muslim* is a conjugate adjective of the verb *aslama* ("he submitted to"), which applies solely in relation to God. The following verses make this clear:

> Abraham was not a Jew, nor yet a Christian, but he was an upright man who had submitted to Allāh, (Hanyf, Muslim) and he was not of the idolators. (3:67)
> And Moses said: O my people! If ye have believed in Allāh then put your trust in Him, if you have indeed submitted (unto Him). (11:85)

Not realizing what the word *muslim* denotes, certain Orientalists have hurled their criticisms against the verses indicating that Noah and Abraham were Muslims. Unable to reconcile these with other verses describing Muḥammad and Moses in turn as the first of Muslims, these Orientalists exclaimed "How then were they Muslims if Muḥammad was the first Muslim?... How could Noah who preceded Muḥammad by more than 2,500 years be a Muslim?"[7]

But, as explained above, the description of *muslim* applies to Noah, Abraham and all the other prophets so there need be no confusion in our minds. This does not contradict the fact that Muḥammad, Abraham and Moses were each the first to submit to the respective order received from Allāh at his specific period of time. The following verses prove this point:

> Say, Lo! my worship and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are for Allāh, Lord of the Worlds. He has no partner. This am I commanded, and I am the first of those who surrender (unto Him). (6:163)

> And when Moses came to Our appointed tryst and his Lord had spoken unto him he said: My Lord, show me Thyself that I may gaze upon Thee. He said: thou shalt not see Me, but gaze upon the mountain. If it stays fast in its place then thou shalt see Me. And when his Lord revealed His glory to the mountain He sent it crashing down, and Moses fell down swooning. And when he awoke he said: Glory be to Thee. I turn unto Thee repentant, and I am the first of the believers. (7:143)

The biblical prophets are also described as Muslim because they have submitted to Allāh:

> Lo! We did reveal the Torah wherein is guidance and light by which the Prophets who submitted (unto God) judged the Jews. (5:44)

Intermediaries Asserted in Islam

The very concept of intermediary is totally unacceptable in Islam. However, Tritton imagined it to exist and wrote: "In six passages of the Qur'an there is a hint of an intermediary between God and man, . . . the spirit is from 'amr' of its Lord — He reveals in every heaven its 'amr' — He controls the 'amr' from heaven to earth and it ascends to Him again." Continuing with his unfortunate confusion of Arabic with Hebrew he went on, "'amr' having the same root as the Hebrew 'memra' denotes a personified agency bridging the gap between the Transcendent God and the world of change and growth."[8]

To begin with, the word *'amr* is mentioned in the Qur'ān not merely six times but 156 times. Moreover other declensions of the word are mentioned fifteen times. Secondly, the confusion between the Arabic word *'amr* and the Hebrew word *memra* need not have taken place had Tritton been aware of the correct meaning of the Arabic word. *Memra* denotes a personified "intermediary" as Tritton wrote, but *'amr* signifies either "order", "injunction", "mandate", "command" or "affair". Even the Oxford Dictionary indicates that *'amara* means "he commanded", hence *'amr* is the noun "command", and *ameer* is "commander or prince". Thirdly, careful reading of the Qur'ānic verses containing the word *'amr* and its declensions discloses the existence of no intermediary whatever.

Let us now look at some of the verses in question, including the ones quoted by Tritton:

> They will ask you concerning the spirit. Say: The spirit is by command ['*amr*] of my Lord, and of knowledge ye have been vouchsafed but little. (17:85)

> There is no good in much of their secret conferences save [in] him who enjoins ['*amara*] almsgiving and peace-making among the people. (4:114)

> Our Lord! Forgive us our sins and our extravagance in our affair. ('*amr*) (3:147)

The interpretations of the Arabic word *'amr* in its various declensions are thus shown to have nothing to do with any intermediary.

Islam accused of polytheism

Another serious misinterpretation was made in the Middle Ages by Ricoldo who naively assumed: "The Qur'ān speaks of God in plural. Thus, God is more than one."[9] On the contrary, when God refers to himself in the Qur'ān as "We", he is still only one. For even a mortal king can refer to himself as "we" in proclamations and the like.

Considerably later, and equally as unfortunate, was Rodwell's

claim that the Prophet was being worshipped as well as God: "In Medina we hear of God's gift and the Apostle's.... and attributes elsewhere applied to God openly applied to himself"[10], that is to the Prophet. Admittedly, the word "prophet" or "messenger" is mentioned often together with the word "Allāh" in the same verse. This, however, implies no trace of polytheism. Examination of relevant verses will clarify this point:

> Obey Allāh and obey His messenger, but if you turn away, then the duty of Our messenger is only to convey (the message) plainly. (64:12)

> And whoso is rebellious to Allāh and His messenger he verily goes astray in error manifest. (33:36)

Rodwell's unjustifiable misconception of polytheism could have been occasioned by such verses as the one rendered;

> There has come unto you a messenger, (one) of yourselves, grievous to him is that you are suffering, full of concern for you, for the believers full of pity, merciful. (9:128)

Here the Prophet who is described as one of us mortals is also described as "full of pity, merciful". These two attributes are used to apply to God in other verses such as:

> It was not Allāh's purpose that your faith should be in vain, for Allāh is full of pity, Merciful toward mankind. (3:143)

But, it cannot be overemphasized that according to Islam when any attribute is applied to Allāh it takes on an infinite dimension, whereas it is only finite when applied to mortals — even if they are prophets. The Qur'ān draws the contrast between Allāh and man very clearly. The prophets are mortals, servants of Allāh who received His messages to deliver to their nations. The status of the Prophet Muḥammad is distinctly shown as being one of those merely serving God.

> He it is Who sends down clear revelations unto His servant that he may bring you forth from darkness unto light. (57:9)

Here, as in many other verses, the actual status of Muḥammad in relation to Allāh is clearly designated. No Muslim could ever be confused on this point. In fact, many Orientalists and historians have admired the immaculate concept of pure monotheism in

Islam.[11] This, unfortunately, was completely overlooked by a very recent writer who wrongly imagined Muḥammad to have adopted monotheism only at a relatively late stage when circumstances allowed, merely as a watchword for distinguishing his friends from his enemies.[12] In his Islamic studies has he not read the Qur'ān and seen for himself how ever since the earliest revelation pure monotheism is so vigorously preached throughout?

Imagined contradictions

Numbered among the false conclusions of Orientalists is the collection of assertions that the Qur'ān contains numerous contradictions. This was alleged in the Middle Ages by Ricoldo and San Pedro and, much later, by Levy, Gardner, Tritton and others.

ASSERTIONS OF THE MIDDLE AGES

It was claimed that the Qur'ān, "both forbade and permitted augury. It asserted rightly that good is from God and sin from man but then said that both good and evil are of God. He (the Qur'ān) said that those who were rich in this world will be lost in the next; but then he says that Abraham was rich in this world and yet to be numbered among the good."[13] This confusion can easily be cleared up by quoting the relevant verses.

1. Concerning augury the initial confusion here may have been caused by the Arabic words for augury and birds which sound very similar. Both words have a common root: "augury" is *taṭayyur* whereas "birds" are *ṭayr*. The relevant verses are 27:47, and 17:13; in fact neither sanctions augury. The foretelling of future events by interpreting the action of birds or by other means, which was sanctioned in Roman religion, is condemned by Islam. According to the faith the future is in Allāh's hands. He alone knows the future and shapes events in compliance with the rules he has laid down. That is why we read in one of the above verses, "Your augury is with Allāh."

The complex subjects of predestination and free will are among those to be discussed in detail in Part II of this book.

2. It was also argued by some Orientalists that Good came from God and Sin from man, but Good and Evil are created by God. This seeming paradox can be cleared up if we study the relevant verse:

> Wheresoever you may be death will overtake you even though you were in lofty towers. Yet if a happy thing befalls them they say: This is from Allāh; and if an evil thing befalls them they say: This is from your doing (O Muḥammad). Say, (unto them): All is from Allāh. What is amiss with these people that they came not right to understand a happening? Whatever of good befalls you it is from Allāh, and whatever of ill befalls you it is from yourself. We have sent you (O Muḥammad) as a messenger unto mankind and Allāh is sufficient as a Witness. (4:78)

This verse and numerous others indicate that both good and evil are under Allāh's control. Man receives blessings through Allāh's grace and as a generous reward for his good work. Yet sometimes, he is inflicted with mishaps as a reminder and a punishment for some of his wrongdoing, or as a test for his faith.

3 Yet another medieval confusion resulted from the misconception:

"Those who were rich in this world will be lost in the next, but Abraham was rich and yet to be numbered among the good".[13] In answer to this criticism, a few relevant verses may be quoted. About riches we read:

> Wealth and children are an ornament of life of this world, but the good deeds which endure are better in your Lord's sight for reward and better in respect of hope. (18:47)

And about Abraham we read:

> Lo! Abraham was a model of virtue, obedient to Allāh, by nature upright, and he was not of the idolators. Thankful for His bounties; He chose him and guided him unto a straight path.
> And We gave him good in this world, and in the Hereafter he is among the righteous. (16: 120–122)

Thus it is clear that the Qur'ān does not say, "those who are rich in this world will be lost in the next." The point it makes in these and many other verses is that wellbeing and hardships are merely tests for us in this world. Those who are thankful to their Lord for His bounties, like Abraham, will be generously rewarded in the Hereafter.

MORE RECENT ASSERTIONS

Among recent claims is a contradiction imagined about false gods by Tritton; another concerning the direction to be faced in prayer by Gardner; a third relating to the creation of man by Levy; and a fourth regarding the Hereafter by Wansbrough.

Concerning false gods, Tritton expressed his bewilderment on this subject also: "Taken literally, what he [the Qur'ān] says about false gods is inconsistent, again and again he says that they are nothing, yet they will be summoned at the judgement to condemn those who claimed to have been led astray by them."[14] Why should Tritton accuse the Book of inconsistency when it never literally states that these false gods are "nothing"? The following verses are pertinent:

> Yet they choose beside Him other gods who create naught but are themselves created and possess not hurt nor profit for themselves, and possess not death nor life, nor power to raise the dead. (25:3)

> Lo! Ye (idolators) and that which ye worship beside Allāh are fuel of hell. Thereunto ye will come.
> If these had been gods they would not have come thither, but all will abide therein. (21:98)

On reading these and other verses (39:38; 2:98; 21:43), not to mention the rest of the sacred Book, one finds that it consistently denounces false gods, and reaffirms their helplessness and uselessness for the idolators who worship them. On the Day of Judgement the idols will provide incriminating evidence against them and will be taken to Hell as an additional shame for the idolators.

Concerning the direction to face in prayer, Gardner's impres-

sion of how the Qur'ān handles this subject is shrouded in perplexity: "In prayer the faithful are ordered in one passage to turn towards Jerusalem and in another they are commanded to turn towards Mecca while in a third they are taught that it is of no importance in what direction they turn in prayer."[15]

Levy repeated the same accusation about forty years later.[16]

First of all, there is not a single verse which orders or suggests that the faithful should face Jerusalem in their prayers. Muslims used formerly to turn in the direction of Jerusalem in their devotions according to a tradition which had the Prophet's approval. During those early years of course, when the Muslim community was just a small minority in Mecca the rest of the inhabitants were idol worshippers and the Ka'bah was surrounded and occupied by idols of all sorts, shapes and sizes. Later in Medina, however, and a few years prior to the Muslims' victorious return to Mecca to cleanse the Ka'bah from all traces of polytheism, this verse was revealed:

> We have seen the turning of your face to heaven (for guidance O Muḥammad) verily We shall make you turn toward a Qiblah which is dear to you. So turn your face toward the Inviolable Place of Worship and ye (O Muslims) wheresoever ye may be, turn your faces (when ye pray) toward it. (2:144)

Thus, there is no contradiction about the direction to be faced in prayer. The divine order is to face the Ka'bah, "the Inviolable Place of Worship".

The verse which confused Gardner, however, is:

> It is not righteousness (that you merely) turn your faces to the East or West but the righteous is he who believes in Allāh and the Last Day and the angels and the scripture and the Prophets; and gives wealth for love of Him to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask; and to set slaves free; and observe proper worship and pay the poor due; and those who keep their promise when they make one and the patient in tribulation and adversity and stress. Such are they who are truthful; such are the God-fearing. (2:177)

This verse should be self-explanatory. It certainly does not say "it is of no importance in what direction they turn in prayer" as Gardner mistakenly inferred.

Concerning the Creation of Man, another contradiction in the Qur'ān was claimed by Levy who stated: "In his revelations the Prophet specifically declares that all living things were created from water, although man, according to another idea was created of clay."[17]

Allāh has created every animal of water. (24:45)

Created man from a clot. (96:2)

He created man of clay like the potter's. (55:14)

He it is Who created you from dust then from a sperm-drop then from a clot, then brings you forth as infants; then that you attain full strength and afterwards you become old. (40:67)

Here, when the Qur'ān declares that man is created "of clay like the potter's", or "of dust", reference is being made to the creation of Adam. the father of mankind. On the other hand, when declaring that man is created from "a drop", the implication is to that from his parents' fluid. A "clot" and water are allusions to the earliest stage of the embryo in the mother's womb. Thus, in truth, there is no contradiction. On the contrary, these statements are proofs of the divinity of the sacred Book: how could it have occurred to an uneducated man in that backward desert land fourteen centuries ago to write down or even to think of these scientific facts, ages before it was proven that approximately 90 per cent of the human body is composed of water?

A contradiction apparently concerns the Hereafter. The believer realizes that the Hereafter is very far from being a simple event. No mere mortal could possibly do it justice in description or even imagination. The Qur'ān describes many happenings which will take place in the afterlife. It draws our attention to its extreme scale of time and space. More will be said on this subject in Part II. But at this stage, two recent comments from Orientalists should be discussed.

Rodinson, referring to the teachings of Jesus that, "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven," added that he found in the earliest passages of the Qur'ān an attitude of "severe hostility towards wealth" and a threat to the rich "of punishment by God".[18] As it happens, the Qur'ān does not condemn those who are rich in this world merely because they are rich, but it does denounce the rich

who become so fond of wealth as to forget their fellow men in need. It is the author's feeling that this is exactly the same as what is meant by the teaching of Jesus. The rich who are warned are those who deny the fact that wealth came to them through Allāh's generosity, and who care not to thank Him for it, but who deprive and despise the poor.

> O ye who believe! Spend of that wherewith We have provided you before a day comes when there will be no trafficking, nor friendship, nor intercession. The disbelievers, they are the wrongdoers. (2:254)

The Qur'ānic verse in which the eye of the needle is mentioned condemns not the rich but those who arrogantly reject God's message:

> Those who reject Our messages and turn away from them haughtily, the doors of heaven will not be opened for them nor will they enter the Garden until the camel passes through the eye of the needle. And thus do We reward the guilty. (7:40)

What matters is how one uses the money one has. If one adores it, amasses and hoards it, to the deprivation of the poor and needy, one is then committing a grievous wrong for which divine retribution should be expected. But when wealth and worldly possessions are recognized as no more than ornaments of this life on earth and how much better and more enduring are good deeds, then he who spends his wealth for the good cause will be generously rewarded among the righteous in Paradise.

In the Hereafter, on certain occasions, after being given ample chance to argue in their defence, some wrongdoers will be deprived of further speech. On other occasions when meeting their wretched companions who remind them of the influence they exercised in this world, each will hurl blame against the other.

Such scenes have bewildered Orientalists like Wansbrough, and, instead of trying to understand them he has resorted to accusations, assumed contradictions and cited in his case these two verses, it would appear, without reading what is written before or after them:

> Couldst thou but see when the wrongdoers will be made to stand before their Lord, throwing back the word (of blame) on one another.

> Those who have been despised will say to the arrogant ones;
> Had it not been for you we should certainly have been believers (34:31).
>
> That will be a Day when they shall not be able to speak.
> Nor will it be open to them to put forward pleas. (77:31–32)

As mentioned above, there will be an extremely arduous succession of events in the Hereafter; a panorama of limitless breadth and depth with endless multitudes of souls each faced with the reward or punishment for his or her work on earth. In view of the immensity of the subject and its metaphysical nature would it not have been more appropriate for Wansbrough and the others to have at least approached it with respect and to have meditated on its various aspects? Instead, with their limited grasp coupled with misconceptions they claimed a final authority and daringly pronounced the Qur'ān to be "contradictory".

Chapter 7

Abrogations

The subject of abrogation has aroused great interest, concern and even excitement among various Orientalists as well as among some Muslim writers. As may be expected, the viewpoints of both parties are basically different. The contrast between them is perhaps as striking as between the word "abrogation" and the Qur'ānic context of the corresponding Arabic word *naskh*. The English version connotes "cancellation", "annulment" or "repeal", none of which are meant in the Arabic original, as will be illustrated below.

A very interesting point concerning this subject of abrogation is the knowledge that it began to arouse interest considerably later than the Prophet's time. This in itself suggests that either there was no abrogation in the early years of Islam and the subject was therefore an invention of later generations, or else whenever a law or code was abrogated by the Prophet, the incident passed by unnoticed. The latter is most unlikely, considering the degree of importance attached to each revelation in the life of the budding Islamic community.

Abrogation as amendment or even as cancellation of one code of conduct as expressed in a Qur'ānic verse, can be classified into three categories; the cancellation supposedly indicated would imply replacement by another verse; a non-Qur'ānic code of conduct would be replaced by a Qur'ānic one; and vice versa. By and large, the first type of supposed abrogation was the Orientalists'

main concern. The third category was wrongly suggested by a few Orientalists, as will be indicated below. Actually, the strongest argument they depended upon was the existence of the word *naskh* in a Qur'ānic verse.

How the subject is mentioned in the Qur'ān

It happens that there is only one verse in which the word *naskh* is mentioned, and only one other in which change is implied. It is necessary to quote both here, together with the verses coming immediately before and after them.

In *Sūrah* 2 ("The Heifer"), there is an elaborate discussion of the Jews' rebellion against Allāh's commands, their defiance towards Moses, their intrigues and hypocrisy, their enmity towards several angels and their rejection of Allāh's message. How could God send a new message after the one they had already received, they exclaimed; if it were an identical message it would be redundant, and if it were different it would be illogical, so why would Allāh do such a thing? Because of this concern with the tribe of Israel, they are referred to in verses 105–107 of the same *Sūrah* as the "people of the Book".

> Neither those who disbelieve from among the people of the Book, nor the polytheists like that any good should be sent down to you from your Lord.
> But Allāh chooses whom He pleases for His Mercy, and Allāh is the Lord of mighty grace. Whatever message We cancel or cause to be forgotten We bring one better than it or one like it.
> Knowest thou not that God is Possessor of power over all things?
> Knowest thou not that Allāh's is the kingdom of the heavens and earth, and that besides Allāh you have not any Patron or helper? (2:105–107)

In the first verse here, the objections raised by the people of the Book are answered; Allāh chooses whom He pleases for His revela-

tions. The second indicates that if one law, namely the biblical law, is cancelled, then a better one is given to Muḥammad.[1] The third verse draws the reader's attention to the kingdom of God, to his sovereignty over the heavens and earth and to the laws of nature prevailing in the universe. Is it not true that the old order in nature gives place to a new, the inferior to the better? It was, therefore, quite natural that the Mosaic law, which was in the main given to a particular people at a certain time and which suited only their requirements, should be replaced by a new and more universal law — that of Islam. The old statute had been effaced and partly forgotten anyway and the time had come for what remained to be cancelled and replaced by a better, and in certain respects a similar law.[2]

The other verse in which annulment is implied is in *Sūrah* **13**. Here an equivalent word is used, *yamḥo* ("efface"). Reaffirming the same argument, and in answer to the disbelievers' demand for Muḥammad to produce a portent the message is clear:

> And verily We sent messengers before you, and We appointed for them wives and children, and it was not given to any messenger that he should bring a portent save by Allāh's leave. For everything there is a time prescribed. Allāh effaces what He will, and establishes (what He will) and with Him is the source of ordinance. (13:38–39)

Partial replacement of an older religion by a new one should in no way be surprising. Was it not indicated by Christian theologians that God sent down the Gospels partly to confirm and partly to abrogate the Torah?

> . . . and confirming what is between my hands of the Torah and to make lawful to you some of what has been prohibited. (3:50)

He taketh away the first that He may establish the second.[3]

The same applies to the Qur'ān related to the Gospel and the Torah. Some Muslim scholars of later generations have even extended this to cover a few specific Qur'ānic verses as related to certain others. A few Orientalists, however, have indulged in wild surmises and even blasphemies.

Some Orientalists' comments

The Islamic concept of Allāh and his sublime attributes includes his absolute power to change anything he wishes[4] at the time he has prescribed. This is in drastic contrast to what a few Orientalists imagine to be "God changing His mind"[5], and to being, therefore, "inconsistent". "What He does today He may recall tomorrow".[6] Several passages in the sacred Book were described as "contradictory".[7] "How can one reconcile this with the theory that contradictions found in the Qur'an were truths once revealed?" exclaimed these Orientalists. "What is eternal is unchangeable and immutable." They even sought support for their claims in the verses cited above where abrogation is referred to, yet overlooking what was actually being discussed — the relation between the Qur'ān and the previous messages.

These Orientalists, imagining abrogation to be a cancellation of the older verse and its replacement by a contradictory one, have hence indulged in the blasphemous assertion that Allāh "changes His mind".[8] This is categorically untrue. What seemed to certain Orientalists as a divine caprice has manifestly appeared to Muslims as a part of a long-term plan predetermined by God. This Islamic concept applies not only to Qur'ānic verses or Islamic rules versus biblical codes, but also to the universe as a whole.

This point can best be illustrated by an event recognized by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. As recorded in both the Bible (Gen. 22), and the Qur'ān (*Sūrah* 37), Abraham had at first received a divine order to sacrifice his son. To him this was an order to be obeyed without question, he never expected it to be abrogated. In utter submission to the will of God, Abraham and his son went to the appointed place, taking the knife with them. This utter submission has been set as an example for the faithful ever since. We know, of course, that Allāh's initial order to Abraham was only temporary; it was never the divine intention that Abraham should sacrifice his son but rather that it should stand as a test to demonstrate his obedience to his Lord. To the sorrowful father's intense joy and relief the divine order was abrogated in time and a ram sacrificed instead.

If this highly significant event is considered by Occidentals as an example of Allāh changing His mind, one must stress that Mus-

lims would never dream of considering it as anything but a stage in the Deity's long-term plan. This point touches on the concept of predestination and free will, which is one of the subjects to be dealt with in Part II of this work.

Now, the abrogations claimed to exist in the Qur'ān, if we may call them so, are much simpler. They could better be described as amendments and confirmations rather than abrogations.[9]
We may consider the following examples.

Alleged Abrogations in the Qur'ān

Twenty such cases have been counted by some of the later Muslim scholars.[10] All of them are Medinan revelations, varying in subject matter and in the degree of change. In the coming paragraphs we will study those related to the three subjects which have been especially criticized by Orientalists. These comprise the prohibition of intoxicants, the rights of widows and the denunciation of idol worship. In each case we will investigate whether any contradiction does exist between the "abrogating" verse and that "abrogated". A fourth case relates to a Qur'ānic code imagined by an Orientalist to have been abrogated on the Prophet's instruction.

1 INTOXICANTS

On this subject Levy criticized the prohibition of wine "which had at one time been associated not only with the healthful nutriments derived from the palm, but also with the sensuous delights of Paradise itself, amongst them being rivers of wine as well as rivers of pure water, milk and honey."[11]

Wine, it is true, is mentioned as an intoxicant by the Qur'ān in three places in relation to its prohibition in this world (2:219; 4:43; 5:90–91); once in relation to its being among the delights available to the faithful in Paradise (47:15); and once when telling the story of Joseph and his fellow prisoners (12:36, 41). But it should never

be overlooked that the wine of Paradise is not at all the same drink as the earthly wine of this world. The prohibition of intoxicants was not instituted until a few years after the Hijra, when the Muslims commenced the formation of their independent state in Medina. The prohibition proceeded in stages. First, intoxicants were not recommended and were excluded from "good nourishment" (16:67), and then it was declared that "the sin in it is greater than its usefulness" (2:219). The second stage was the limiting of periods during which drinking was allowed; the believers were commanded to shun intoxicants while making ready for prayers, lest they might not know what they were saying (4:43). Finally, their harmfulness was stressed, and intoxicants were categorically banned.

There are Muslim writers who consider the last verse as abrogating the first two (in the following citation), but rather it should be viewed as complementing, instead of contradicting them.

> They question you about intoxicants and games of chance, Say: in both is great sin and (some) utility for men; but the sin of them is greater than their usefulness. (2:219)

> O ye who believe! Draw not near unto prayer when ye are drunken, till ye know that which ye utter; nor when ye are polluted, save when journeying upon the road, till ye have bathed. (4:43)

> O ye who believe, intoxicants and games of chance and idols and divining arrows are only abominations of Satan's handiwork. Avoid them in order that ye may succeed. Satan seeks only to cast among you enmity and hatred by means of intoxicants and games of chance, and to turn you from remembrance of Allāh and from (His) worship. Will you then abstain? And obey Allāh and obey the messenger and beware. But if ye turn away, then know that the duty of Our messenger is only plain conveyance (of the message). (5:90–91)

We find that the verse cited by Levy in fact discriminates between, rather than associates intoxicants with "healthful nutriments derived from the palm":

> And of the fruits of the date palm, and grapes, whence ye derive intoxicants and (also) good nourishment. (16:67)

Surprisingly, contradictions were claimed by Menezes and Levy to exist between the verses rendered above (2:219; 4:43) and Levy even contended that one should replace the other.

As we have seen, there is no contradiction between these two verses nor between them and any other verse in the sacred Book.

2 WIDOWS' RIGHTS

Hughes contended that "Verse 234, *Sūrah* 2 is acknowledged by all commentators to have been revealed after verse 240, *Sūrah* 2 which it abrogates." Careful study discloses the real significance of their subject matter:

> Such of you who die and leave behind them wives, they (the wives) shall wait, keeping themselves apart, four months and ten (days). And when they reach the term (prescribed for them) then there is no sin for you in aught that they may do with themselves in decency. God is aware of what you do. (2:234)

> (In the case of) those of you who are about to die and leave behind them wives, they should bequeath unto their wives a provision for the year without turning them out, but if they go out (of their own accord) there is no sin for you in that which they do of themselves within their rights. Allāh is Mighty, Wise. (2:240)

Two slightly different aspects of the widow's predicament are here under discussion. The first verse indicates that she should not remarry for a period of four months and ten days after her late husband's death, this being a period just long enough to ascertain whether or not she might be carrying his child. The second verse outlines certain of the widow's financial rights and her privilege to remain in her late husband's house for the year subsequent to his death — unless she decides to move to another residence of her own.

Now, after reading the relevant verses and realizing their mutual complement one wonders where is the contradiction here as alleged by Hughes?

3 IDOL WORSHIP: A SPECIAL ABROGATION ALLEGED

This claim is concerned with the Meccan *Sūrah* 53 ("The Star"), in which verses 19–23 discuss the main idols which used to be worshipped.

> Have you thought upon Al-Lat and Al-'Uzza,
> And Manat, the third, the other?
> Are yours the males and His the females?
> That indeed would be an unfair division.
> They are but names which ye have named, ye and your fathers, for which Allāh has revealed no warrant.
> They follow but a guess and that which (they) themselves desire.
> And now the guidance from their Lord had come to them. (53:19–23)

Sir Mark Sykes (as quoted by H.G. Wells), Watt and others[12], have claimed there originally existed a verse in this *Sūrah* between those numbered 20 and 21 which praised the idols, but that this was deleted later. Strangely enough, this assertion was repeated by some Oriental commentators like al-Baiḍawy without the support of any reliable *isnād* or logical argument. All of them have overlooked the fact that every verse — including those later to be claimed as abrogating — was recorded in the Qur'ān during the Prophet's lifetime, and has been cherished by Muslims ever since. Not a single word, not even a letter has been deleted, as was explained in Chapter 3.

Watt conjectured that both the first and second versions were proclaimed publicly, "It is unthinkable that any one should have invented such a story"[13], not realizing that 50–100 years following the Prophet's death literally thousands of invented sayings were attributed to him — the fabrication of both Arabs and non-Arabs of varying political and religious backgrounds. What was authentic and what was not was all finally sorted out by al-Bokhāry, Muslim, and others.

Watt, carried much further by his imagination than his scholarship, actually accused the Prophet of being a polytheist during the early years of the call. He asserted: "At this stage his monothe-

ism did not exclude some form of prayer to subordinate supernatural beings who were perhaps regarded as a kind of angel". However, this argument fails to convince in the light of copious evidence from 53:26, the very same *Sūrah* which Watt cites:

> And how many angels in the heavens whose intercession avails naught save after Allāh gives leave to whom He chooses and accepts. (53:26)

"Does this mean that he was a polytheist at the time?" surmised Watt[14], imagining Muḥammad to have only learnt monotheism after coming in contact with Jews and Christians in Medina. One wonders what made Watt ignore, in his studies, the basic teachings of Islam and completely overlook the very fact that the central theme of the Prophet's preaching from the dawn of the Call was immaculate monotheism. Here is rendered one of the very earliest revelations:

> Say, He Allāh is One. Allāh is He eternally besought by all.
> He begets not, nor was He begotten.
> And comparable unto Him is not anyone. (112:1–4)

This *Sūrah* was chronologically followed by the one containing the alleged abrogation; both advocate immaculate monotheism.

Many of Muḥammad's followers were severely persecuted for obstinately clinging to a faith which concentrates on pure monotheism. A famous story in the annals of Islam concerns Bilāl, the Abyssinian slave who was cruelly tortured in the burning desert heat in order to compel him to denounce his adopted faith. The brave soul merely repeated, "Aḥad! Aḥad!" ("God is One") over and over again, despite a heavy stone crushing his chest. Fortunately, Bilāl was rescued by Abu-Bakr, who purchased his freedom.

The Prophet was never known on any occasion to have compromised with the disbelievers with regard to the doctrine of the absolute unity of God. Here is one of the earliest *Sūrahs*, revealed at a time when the disbelievers imagined they could come to a compromise. This *Sūrah* has the chronological order 18, and categorically rejected the disbelievers' religion.

> Say, O disbelievers! I worship not that which you worship.
> Nor do you worship that which I worship.
> And I shall not worship that which you worship.

> Nor will you worship that which I worship.
> Unto you your faith, and unto me mine. (109:1–6)

These verses and other facts are surely proofs of the pure monotheism at the core of the Islamic faith since its inception. Muslims also hold that monotheism was preached by every messenger from Allāh.

> And We sent no messenger before you but We revealed to him that there is no God but Me, so serve Me. (21:25)

Against all this we must set the fabricated story about the goddesses repeated by Daniel, Watt, Gardner[15] and others. Even H.G. Wells in his *Outline of History*[16] echoed the same allegation, "that the Prophet had believed in some goddesses including the image Manif, after whom he had named his son." Wells thereby made a mistake as Manif was not the name of the Prophet's son but of his great grandfather (ᶜAbd-Manāf). Savary gave the correct names of all the Prophet's seven children, well known to Muslims as 'Abdullāh, al-Qāsim, Ibrahîm, Faṭma, Zeinab, Roqayya and Umm–Kulthūm.[17]

In the year 150 after the Hijra, Ibn-Isḥāq was quoted by Abu-Ḥabbān in his treatise *Al-Baḥr Al-Moḥīṭ*, to have exposed the whole story about the goddesses as an invention of *al-Zanādiqah*, those who do not recognize Islam while still nominally attached to it or to any other religion. Abu-Ḥabbān stated that there is no trace of it in any of the authoritative books on Tradition such as those of Bokhāry, nor on Qur'ānic exegesis such as the one by Ibn-Kathir. Furthermore, the celebrated Judge 'Ayaḍ, in his book *Al-Shifā'* stated: that this was not brought down to us by the trustworthy tradition writers, by any link of *Isnād*.

Meanwhile, the Orientalists' reports we read concerning this story are contradictory: one claims that the Prophet uttered the alleged verse during his prayers; another describes him to have proclaimed it in a gathering of his fellow Muslims; a third that Satan "let it flow through on his tongue"; a fourth that the Prophet wished it to be a revelation until Gabriel came to him, saying; "This is not the way I taught you." Other versions can be found, probably devised for amusement more than anything else.

There is also the very important point to be considered: How would the claimed passage have blended in with the rest? Careful

reading should show there would have been a definite disruption of the harmony:

> Have ye thought upon Al-Lat and Al-'Uzza?
> And Manat the third, the other?
> Are yours the males and His the females?
> That indeed would be an unfair division.
> They are but names which ye have named, ye and your fathers for which Allāh has revealed no warrant.
> They follow but a guess and that which (they) themselves desire.
> And now the guidance from their Lord has come unto them.
> Or shall man have what he covets?
> But unto Allāh belongs the after (life) and the former.
> And how many angels are in the heavens whose intercession avails naught save after Allāh gives leave to whom He chooses and accepts?
> Lo! It is those who disbelieve in the Hereafter who name the angels with the names of females.
> And they have no knowledge thereof. They follow but a guess, and Lo! A guess can never take the place of the truth. (53:19–28)

The alleged passage, "they are the exalted ones", was supposed to have been inserted between verses 20 and 21. It stands out as palpably false.

It is of crucial importance here to add that this *Sūrah* 53 — the subject of the Orientalists' allegations — begins with the dazzling declaration that it is not for the messenger to change, add or delete any part of the Book of his own accord:

> By the star when it falls,
> Your comrade errs not, nor is he deceived,
> Nor does he speak of (his own) desire.
> It is naught save an inspiration that is inspired,
> which One of mighty powers has taught him. (53:1–5)

It is thus clear that the alleged insertion is, as Ibn-Isḥāq has stated, nothing but an invention of later writers who simply had no faith, no logic and lamentably no significant understanding of the Book.

4 TRADITION IMAGINED TO ABROGATE A QUR'ĀNIC CODE

Yet another Orientalist has very recently expressed his suspicion that a Qur'ānic ruling was waived by the Prophet who established, instead, his own Tradition.[18] The subject relates to the punishments for the crimes of illicit sexual intercourse. The relevant verse orders those unmarried men and women who commit these crimes to be flogged (24:2), and punishment was actually administered by the Prophet and his caliphs. For the married partners who commit the same crime, the biblical retribution is stoning to death (Deut. 22:21–24). This penalty was not abrogated by the Qur'ān, and, in fact, the Prophet implemented it. Thus it is quite clear that there are two distinct cases and that these were unfortunately confused by Burton.

Conclusion

The above examples should demonstrate the falsity of the wild assumptions put forward by certain Orientalists. Their claims can be exposed as wrong, groundless and unjustifiable. Had a repeal taken place, the Prophet would have been the one to give instructions to his companions who would have devotedly carried them out.

Further, Islamic history would certainly have recorded the occasion and circumstances giving rise to any abrogation. What actually happened is that the Prophet never instructed any of his scribes or companions to replace an old verse with a new one.[19] However, if the term is interpreted to mean "amending" or "complementing" the earlier verse, then both have always been there in the *Muṣ-ḥaf* to be read and studied by everyone, ever since the sacred Book was first compiled.

Chapter 8
A Pause for Recapitulation

Now that we have read through the several comments on the Qur'ān, its authorship, style, subject matter, chronological and textual orders, certain mistaken English translations and the conclusions based thereon, let us pause for a moment to reflect on all these comments.

It has been demonstrated how all the non-Muslim writers whose works we have read, both of the Middle Ages and of later centuries, have categorically denied the Islamic claim that the Qur'ān was composed by Allāh. Non-Muslims may have some excuse here because they have never known any book to be claimed as having divine authorship. Even the Gospels and the Torah were written by mortals. Multitudinous Western readers would accept to the same degree the authenticity of divine messages delivered by biblical prophets, as they would the voices heard and the visions seen by saints of the Christian faith among whom are numbered St Paul, St Francis of Assisi, and St Joan of Arc.[1] It is surely a strange paradox, therefore, that so many Western readers would just as strongly and without any hesitation or meditation deny the divine origin of the Qur'ān.

But there remains the account of the giving of the Ten Commandments from God to Moses in the Old Testament:

> And the Lord said unto Moses, come up to Me into the mountain, and be there; and I will give thee the tables of stone and the

law and the commandment which I have written, that thou mayest teach them. (Exod. 24:12)

The Qur'ān invites us to reflect on this fact (6:91–92). The laws and commandments given to Moses from God cannot be found now in their original language; the versions in our possession are the results of repeated translations and the inevitable corresponding variations down the centuries. The original version ceased to be available centuries ago. The same applies equally to the New Testament.

The Qur'ān, on the other hand, as explained above, has remained pure in its original language, with every word, even every letter in its place in the text, unchanged from the time it was first revealed. So it has always remained, available for study and verification of the truth and the correctness of every relevant comment. That the sacred Book has survived unchanged for so vast a period of time, despite the social, political and economical upheavals that took place in the world in different countries, nations and languages, is in itself a miracle to be reflected on.

The English reader, however, has access to the Qur'ān only in interpreted versions and examples have been given to show that no translation can quite do the Qur'ān justice. Some of the English translations which have gained fame for decades were second- even third-hand versions, obtained from the Arabic via Latin and/or French. Only a few were made directly from Arabic into English and done so with care, like those of Arberry and Pickthall. Yet, they can still be no more than monochromatic sketches of the natural, colourful, rich original. Reading through one or two translations would never be sufficient for anyone wanting to appreciate the Qur'ān fully and to experience its wealth of ideas, and the impressive impact on the intellect, emotion and imagination.

Unfortunately, as we have seen, most of the commentaries published in the West were the work of scholars with an imperfect understanding of the Qur'ān. This, naturally, has given rise to various misconceptions. Almost all Orientalists reviewed here have asserted that the sacred Book was the work of the Prophet Muḥammad, with or without help. Those who lived about half a century ago, including Menezes and Gardner, were of the opinion that the Prophet was helped by Jews or Christians, but both assertions have been proved wrong. More modern writers like Ander-

son and Watt came to the conclusion that the Qur'ān was the result of the Prophet's "wishful thinking" or "creative imagination"; which again could easily be ruled out by the fact that no mere mortal has ever been able to compose a similar book whether by wishful thinking, creative imagination or whatever.

A writer of the last century called Nöldeke, followed by certain others earlier in this century, including Rodwell, arrived at a very distorted understanding of the Qur'ān. Instead of trying to comprehend the depth of its content they decided instead to rearrange its *Sūrahs*. Now, as is well known, the textual order of the *Sūrahs* is not the same as their chronological order. It is therefore pointless for several reasons to attempt to rearrange them so that they follow one another in the text according to their chronological order. One is that they were revealed in instalments, each revelation meeting a specific occasion. Many *Sūrahs* were partly revealed in Mecca and partly in Medina years later; such *Sūrahs* would consequently have multiple chronological orders. Furthermore, the textual order was made according to the Prophet's instructions and has therefore come to be cherished by Muslims ever since. Even a mathematical pattern of the alphabet can be discerned throughout the whole book by the way in which it has been arranged.

However, these writers who attempted to rearrange the *Sūrahs* followed various hypotheses and reached divergent results. What they all had in common was an adamant refusal to accept the correct textual and chronological orders, and through their persistent attempts at rearrangement they seem merely to have moved farther away from a true understanding.

It is a saddening thought to realize how many would-be readers have been distracted by encountering so formidable a volume of unjustifiably adverse criticism and groundless accusations which have obscured the facts about the Qur'ān. The prejudice against it and against Islam as a whole, born in the Middle Ages, appears to have lingered on since those dark centuries. Sadly, numerous Western writers have found it easier to echo the same conjectures rather than to engage in serious study of adequate references covering the spectrum of views, their inductions and backgrounds. Had these critics carried out more careful and scientific studies they would have done better justice to their readers, to themselves, and above all, to the truth they were ostensibly looking for.

In the discussion so far, attention has been drawn to the Qur'ānic authorship, its composition, literary style, and the history of how it came to be written down, arrangements of *Sūrahs*, abrogations and translations. Now it is the time to embark on a guided tour of the salient subjects dealt with in the sacred Book, particularly those which have aroused greatest interest in the West. As mentioned earlier, the Qur'ān embodies the spirit of Islam which is a wholesome, integrated and comprehensive way of life, rather than a dull, illogical and dogmatic set of religious rites.

Thus, it is proposed that, in Part II of this book, we briefly review the Qur'ānic concept of God, its code of morality, predestination and free will as well as the Qur'ānic impressions of the supernatural world.

Part II

Chapter 9

The Qur'ānic Concept of God

Allāh

While some misinformed people in the West may imagine Allāh merely as a deity adopted by Muḥammad and his followers, in Islam he is proclaimed as no other than the one true God who created and maintains the universe; who, through his extreme kindness and love of man sent down his messages of guidance and comfort; who, with his superlative justice and mercy will in the Hereafter judge man for his work.

The Oxford Dictionary and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* render the word "Allāh" simply yet emphatically as the Arabic name used by Muslims of all nationalities for the One True God. The word "Allāh" is unique and cannot be translated, nor does it have any derivation. It connotes all the attributes of perfection and beauty in their infinitude, and denotes none but the one and unique God. The English word "God" does not convey the actual meaning of the word "Allāh" which is not a common noun but a proper noun par excellence. The word "Allāh" cannot be made plural nor feminine, as "god" is turned into "gods" and "goddesses".[1]

His unity and attributes

The Qur'ānic concept of Allāh as one is immaculate. With recourse to genuine logic and clear intelligence this reality is power-

fully driven home, while every kind of polytheism is refuted and condemned.

Allāh's attributes are naturally the most exalted in every imaginable aspect of goodness and nobility. They are magnificently enshrined in his ninety-nine names and in the Qur'ān. Their rich significance in the Arabic original cannot be adequately expressed in translation.

Allāh's unity is discussed in many *Sūrahs*; the one most well known is rendered:

> Say, He is Allāh the One
> Allāh is He the eternally besought by all.
> He begets not, nor was He begotten,
> And comparable unto Him is not anyone. (112:1–4)

His attributes and the fact that he has no partners is emphasized in several *Sūrahs*:

> Allāh, there is no god but He, the Ever-living,
> the self-subsisting by Whom all subsist.
> Slumber overtakes Him not, nor sleep.
> To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens
> and whatever is in the earth.
> Who is he that can intercede with Him save by His permission?
> He knows what is before them and what is behind them,
> and they encompass nothing of His knowledge except
> what He pleases.
> His throne encompasses the heavens and the earth,
> and the preservation of them both tires Him not.
> And He is the Most High, the Great. (2:255)

He is Allāh, the Compassionate, the Merciful, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, the Keeper of Faith, the Granter of Security, the Author of Peace, the Guardian over all, the Sustainer, the Majestic, the Compeller, the Superb, the Benign, the Loving and the Provider, the Generous and the Benevolent, the Rich and the Independent, the Forgiving and the Clement, the Patient and the Appreciative, the Unique and the Protector, the Judge and the Peace, the All-mighty, the All-knowing, the All-seeing and the All-hearing (*Sūrahs* 2, 3, 11, 35, 52, 65, 85,).

As 'Abdel-'Aṭi puts it: "There are various ways to know God and there are many things to tell about Him,"[2] The great wonders and the impressive marvels of the world are like open books in

which we can read about Allāh. And Allāh himself graciously and kindly comes to our aid through the messengers and revelations He has sent down to mankind. So, by reflecting on Nature, by hearing the words of his messengers and by reading his revelations, we can gain the most convincing knowledge about Allāh and his attributes.

In addition to those Orientalists who have appreciated the Islamic concept of God, there are inevitably several who have laboured under misconceptions, as will be demonstrated in the following pages. There are also the groups of "scientific" atheists who, oddly enough, boast of their denial that God exists. They claim to believe that the universe came into being as a result of a random phenomenon, a mere accident, nothing more.

It is man's intelligence and faculty of reason which sets him above the brutes and qualifies him to reflect on the universe and contemplate the Deity and His attributes. Thinking of any one of the endless number of physical phenomena around us, one is bound to ask how and why? Let us take any one phenomenon out of an infinite multitude. Consider the planet we live on and how it spins with its huge size around its axis at such a terrific, though constant smooth speed; yet no vibrations have ever been felt. How was it made with its enormous volume so perfectly balanced? A simple comparison may be made with the wheels of motor cars, trucks, bicycles and the like. How many such wheels have been manufactured since the turn of the century? It might be of the order of hundreds of millions, of various sizes, weights and designs. The industry has now reached a high level of development and sophistication. Many teams of engineers and technicians with high intelligence and ample education co-operate in the design, checking and double checking of the materials, equipment and gadgets necessary for the manufacture. Not a single wheel was ever known to have come up as the product of a random uncontrolled process. Besides, each single wheel has to be adjusted and a small weight of lead has to be attached at a specific point on its rim otherwise it will wobble when rotating at a high speed.

Following any simple logic, one asks; Would not the earth need a much higher intellect and a much greater power for its design and making? Its mass, the size of its orbit around the sun, the composition of its crust, the thickness, composition and density of its sheath of atmospheric air, the existence of the one moon with its specific angular speed around it, are all undoubtedly just suit-

able for life on it. Did not all these characteristics need planning, design and power to bring into being? Might it all be a mere fortuitous phenomenon produced by no one? Might there be no creator with great attributes?

Orientalists' comments on Allāh's Unity

In the Middle Ages certain Western writers made the erroneous assumption that Muslims worshipped Muḥammad as an idol, and hence wrongly dubbed them "Mohammedans".[3] However, with the development of different methods of transportation and communication, more factual information concerning Islam became available in the West and this false dogma was condemned. Nowadays it is unlikely that any well-informed person of whatever background would subscribe to such an arrant misconception.

Indeed, ever since the seventeenth century at least, a number of Western commentators have admired God's unity as logically defined and powerfully defended by the Qur'ān. In 1698 Father Maracci was quoted to have said, "It would be a loss of time to refute those who suppose the God of Muḥammad to be different from the True God."[4] In our own time, Gibb considers the Qur'ān to be the record and instrument in the process of reconstruction of religious thought: "There are two sides to it, the rooting out of all animistic associations from worship and belief, and the substitution of the positive monotheistic interpretation of the universe and everything in it."[5] The complete freedom from "theological complications, the sacrificial priest and the temple" were highly admired by H.G. Wells.[6]

By contrast, Zwemer described the Qur'ānic concept of Allāh as the "barren monotheism of Islam".[7] As Anderson saw it, the Muslim God "could best be understood in the desert. Its vastness, majesty, ruthlessness and mystery, and the resultant sense of utter insignificance of man, call forth man's worship and submission."[8] Today, this sense of man's insignificance is magnified

tremendously as he explores the depths of the oceans and probes outer space. On the deep ocean-bed life assumes especially fascinating dimensions, while in outer space the atmosphere thins out into a vacuum and the hazards of meteors and irradiation become grave. Man's life span seems indeed insignificant as compared to the time needed to travel to some distant planet or star. The dangers inherent in space travel or at sea, where ships sometimes become helpless among the storm-tossed waves despite their advanced and sophisticated design, call for man's worship and submission to his Lord just as emphatically as when he is surrounded by the vastness of the desert.

Even without needing to travel into outer space or to dive to the bottom of the ocean, the rational mind, merely by reflecting on the atoms of matter, whether solid, liquid or gaseous, — their constituent electrons and other particles, and how they behave as a result of different physical and chemical changes — can find ample proof of Allāh's existence. If further proof is needed then merely to contemplate the marvellous working of the human body with its complex, intricate nervous, respiratory, circulation and digestive systems should convince the rational mind of the divine unity and of Allāh's exalted attributes.

Some confusion concerning the subject of Islamic monotheism was shown by Daniel[9], and by Menezes who criticized the Prophet for hallowing the Ka'bah in Mecca, in particular the Black Stone embedded in one of its corners. "All make us doubt," declared Menezes, "whether he [Muḥammad] really denounced idolatry generally or denounced only such idolatry as did not meet his taste."[10]

The Ka'bah was built by Abraham and his son Ishmael as a place for monotheistic prayer. Islamic tradition tells us that Abraham put the same Black Stone in position with his own hands in the very place it still occupies today, forming one of the corner stones of the Ka'bah. Was not Abraham the first distinguished example of the devout Muslim? He was brave enough, even in his youth, to denounce the practice of idol-worship adopted by his people — including his own father. Quitting his homeland he went into the wilderness in submission to the will of God, taking with him his wife and child. In a supreme gesture of obedience Abraham was even prepared to sacrifice his own son at his Lord's command. Consequently, the Ka'bah in Islam is not connected with a super-

stition but rather with a deep religious sentiment felt in every believer's heart. As the first place ever built for the worship of God alone it is the focus towards which all Muslims direct themselves in their prayers.

Numerous critics such as Bell, Tritton, Stobart, and Watt[11] have claimed that the concept of monotheism in Islam was originally learnt from the Jews and Christians. In truth, this concept remains the same in Islam as when it was originally preached by Abraham, Moses and Jesus. There is nothing new about the monotheistic essence of Allāh's message to mankind. As the basic fact of the universe, it could not be imagined to change with time or place. In Gibb's words: "If by originality is meant the entirely new system of ideas about God and humanity, the relation between them and the spiritual significance of the universe, then originality has neither place nor value in monotheistic religion."[12]

Far from professing to bring new teachings, the Prophet declared that he was restating the monotheistic faith delivered to the prophets before him, confirming their scriptures.

> Say: we believe in Allāh and that which is revealed to us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have submitted. (2:136)

So it can scarcely be described as a Jewish or Christian invention. It may be appropriate at this point to give a few quotations from modern versions of the Old and New Testaments related to the concept of monotheism.

From the Old and New Testaments

Anderson has commented: "We constantly read in the Old Testament of idolatry among Israel and Judah where we are told that King Manasseh erected altars for other gods in the very temple of

God, the nation taking up such idolatry quite eagerly. Only after the Babylonian captivity, when a small proportion of the Jewish nation returned to Palestine, did the reference to the worship of Baal and other gods cease."[13] (II Kings 5:21; II Chr.33)

In Exodus God has assigned Moses as a god to Pharoah:

> And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharoah and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. (Exod. 7:1)

God is sometimes described as "God of the Hebrews" alone and as not having much concern for the rest of mankind. Plurality of gods is vividly depicted in Jeremiah:

> For according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah. (Jer. 2:28)

Also in each of the four Gospels we read of the teachings of Jesus, the master; but not one of them advocates the doctrine of the Trinity as such. Long before Jesus, the Mago-Zoroastrians, the Romans and the Egyptians had believed in some form of polytheism. Subsequent to the Greek conquest of Egypt, when Alexandria became the centre of the religious life for the whole Hellenic world, a kind of trinity of gods was worshipped: Serapis, Isis, and Horus. These were not regarded as separate gods but as three aspects of one god, — Serapis being identified with the Greek's Zeus, the Roman's Jupiter and the Persian's sun god.[14]

In 325 Constantine's Council of Nicæa triggered off the start of the controversy among the Christian sects, centering around the single or dual nature of Jesus in relation to God. The nature of Jesus has been the main theme for thinkers in Christendom.[15] Almost every publishing season, it seems, the mills of scholarship produce new "evidence" purporting to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was not the son of God. Among the more absurd recent theories is the contention that he was merely a frustrated Jewish revolutionary, or that he was a symbolic head of a hallucinogenic mushroom cult! Now a professor of ancient history at Columbia University has come up with yet another far-fetched theory that Jesus "was a magician who used a secret baptismal ceremony."[16]

Surely it is scarcely imaginable that Jesus would ever have allowed his followers to become involved in such violent schisms and mutual persecutions over the nature of his person.

Orientalists' comments on the attributes of God

Arberry is among those who marvelled at the pure, Islamic concept of God: He is One, Single, Eternal, Everlasting; there is no eternal but He, no god beside Him, that He is neither body nor shape, nor form, nor person, nor element, that He is not affected by faults nor overcome with slumber; that He is not contained in space nor affected by time, that He has never ceased thus and will never cease thus, that He is acquainted with everything and that there is nothing like Him.[17]

But whereas scholars like Hughes have greatly respected "Islam's conception of the Divine nature, its deep and fervent trust in the power of God"[18]; and have admired the Muslims saying in their prayers "I extol the holiness of my Lord, the Great"[19], yet a critic such as C.D. Dale[20] alleged that "among the bad features of Islam is its incapacity to grasp the holiness of God."

To the Muslim, Allāh and man are categorically, fundamentally and absolutely different; there can be no kinship whatsoever between them. To the Christian, however, man is thought of as a child of God.[21] According to Gairdner, "Islam preserves Allah's unity, His majesty and power but at the ruinous cost of depriving Him of love and holiness." He went on to exclaim: "The impossibility of likeness to, or union with, God accounts for the extraordinary formality and unspirituality of most Muslims' religion. How shall Allah, so remote, so totally and essentially 'different' from man, nevertheless reach man?"[22]

Yet another blasphemous assertion — as far as Muslims are concerned — maintained the Muslim concept of Allāh to be, "an omnipotent and capricious power. With this mighty and irresponsible being nothing can prevail. Mankind can alter no tiniest detail of his destined lot. The idea corresponds with Muḥammad's vision of God — an awful, incomprehensible deity, who dwells perpetually in the terrors of earth, not in its gentleness and compassion."[23] These allegations by Bethman, Draycott and Dale concerning the lack of love and holiness in the Islamic concept of the Deity are groundless. In truth, there is a striking contrast between the Qur'ānic concept of Allāh, and certain descriptions in other books. We read, for instance, in the Old Testament of God

walking in the garden amongst the trees, and Adam and Eve hiding themselves from him, so that he would not see them (Gen. 3:8–10). Also in Genesis (Gen. 8:21), God is described as smelling the sweet savour and regretting in his heart smiting everything living. In Exodus, we find Moses praising the Lord saying, "The Lord is a man of war" (Exod. 15:3), but reproaching him for his fierce wrath against his people and asking him to repent in remembrance of his covenant to Abraham, Isaac and Israel (Exod. 32:11–14). We further read from Exodus, "The Lord, after making heaven, earth, the sea and all that is in them in six days, rested on the seventh" (Exod. 20:11). Then in Nehemiah, God is described as "Great and Terrible" (Neh. 4:14).

These are pertinent quotations from current versions of the Old Testament. The anthropomorphic way in which the Deity is represented is very similar to the way Jupiter, the father of the gods in Greek mythology, is depicted descending to earth to see for himself how things were going on.[24] Anderson, Zwemer, Lewis and others have elaborated on the Christian idea of God. Anderson comments: "In Christ God came down to earth and revealed himself to men, gave them salvation and life which cost God Himself."[25] In Pope Gregory's *Moralia*: "God speaks only once and does not repeat Himself or answer individual questions individually."[26]

Lewis, meanwhile, holds strong views: "Indeed, the belief in the recurring avator of God coming down in human form as need arises is the very prominent feature of Hinduism. But this is nonetheless a very different notion of incarnation to the one we find in Christianity. In the Christian notion of incarnation God becomes 'truly man.'[27]

"How alien the distinctively Christian ideas seem today to most people in the western parts of the world where the Christian faith has prevailed in the past. 'Incarnation', 'atonement', 'redemption', 'grace', 'salvation,' 'reconciliation', to say nothing of vivid metaphors like 'being washed in the blood of the lamb' are words which convey hardly any meaning to the younger generations of today... The Christian has indeed the obligation to seek the profoundest understanding of the claims he makes."[28]

Now, after presenting the contemporary Jewish concept of God by referring to the Old Testament alone, and the Christian one by quoting Christian scholars alone, it would only be fair to look at the non-Muslim statements on the Islamic concept of Allāh in the

light of the relevant Qur'ānic verses. Firstly, however, it should be most emphatically stated that among the Islamic beliefs is acceptance that both Moses and Jesus received divine revelations to preach pure monotheism; which each most ardently did till the end of his term on earth (5:116–120; 7:142–147).

Von Grunebaum declared: "Islam has never developed sacramental mysteries; it has remained faithful to its origin by showing erring man the path to paradise in a purely rational, almost technical manner. But man, rewarded or punished remains man; God does not descend to earth to lift man beyond himself. In fact, to this day the concept of the suffering God as well as the complementary concepts of original sin and salvation from sin have remained alien to Islam to the point of being intellectually incomprehensible."[29]

But, according to Islam as explained by many writers[30] man by nature remains man whether he does good or bad. By his faith in God, by good work and the help of the Compassionate, the Merciful, he can however become more spiritual, with a clearer mind, a purer heart and more transparent feelings. On the other hand, if through lack of faith, man persistently indulges in evil deeds and transgressions without repenting or even regretting them, he is becoming more earthly and going farther astray from the straight path.

As mentioned earlier, Allāh has the most magnificent names. Furthermore, Allāh is so highly exalted and omnipotent that there is no need for him to descend to earth and to be physically contained in a limited space in order to know man and to lift him above his sins. It is He who created man (Gen. 10), and created the whole universe, and it is He who has maintained and evolved them. Neither their creation nor their maintenance tire Him or cause Him to need rest. He is more than capable of bringing the dead back to life.

> See they not that Allāh Who created the heavens and the earth and was not tired by their creation, is able to give life to the dead? Aye! He is surely Possessor of power over all things. (46:33)

His knowledge, power and mercy, not being confined to man-made conceptions of space and time, can very easily reach and overwhelm every man and woman, without their having to imagine him coming down to earth or personified in any way.

We verily created man and We know what his soul whispers to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein. (50:16)

All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Allāh, and He is the Mighty, the Wise. His is the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth; He quickens and gives death; and He is able to do all things. He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward and He is Knower of all things. He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then He controlled the Throne. He knows all that enters the earth and all that emerges therefrom, and all that comes down from the sky and all that ascends therein; and He is with you wheresoever you may be. And Allāh is seer of what you do. His is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and unto Allāh all things are brought back. He causes the night to pass into the day, and He causes the day to pass into the night and He is Knower of all that is in the breasts. (57:1–6)

Reflecting on these verses, although in translation, one realizes how erroneous was Gairdner's cry, "How shall Allāh, so remote, so totally and essentially different from man, nevertheless reach man? What links can He forge?"[31] Gairdner overlooked the fact that, although He is different from man, God can very well reach him simply because man is his creation, whom he maintains in every respect and from moment to moment.

Just as mistaken are Bethman, Draycott, Anderson and Stobart when they described Allāh as "immeasurably removed from his creatures," and it is surprising to see Tritton, who was professor of Arabic, misunderstand the Qur'ān to the extent of stating, "for many Muslims God is far off" [32]

Among the axioms of Islam is the principle of the absolute fairness and justice of Allāh, as well as his unimaginable mercy and generosity. Each individual, man or woman, is directly responsible to God for his or her own work. If good has been done his or her reward will be liberally multiplied in this world and the Hereafter. If the record is bad there is still a chance for repentance and the granting of forgiveness, but if wrongdoing is persistently indulged in — thereby defying Allāh — then a just punishment must be expected. This is clearly expressed in many Qur'ānic verses:

> Lo! Allāh wrongs not even for the weight of an atom; and if there is a good deed, He will multiply it and will give (the doer) from what He has a great reward. (4:40)

> That no bearer of a burden bears another's burden:
> And that man can have nothing but what he strives for.
> And his striving will soon be seen. Then he will be rewarded for it with the fullest reward.
> And that to thy Lord is the destiny. (53:38–42)

> Whoever brings a good deed will have tenfold like it, and whoever brings an evil deed will be recompensed only with the like of it, and they shall not be wronged. (6:161)

Consequently, when Adam and Eve committed the sin of eating the fruit God had forbidden, it was their own sin for which they repented. And Allāh, being infinitely merciful and generous, forgave them. According to divine justice Adam's sin would never be visited on the head of any of his seed nor be the original sin from which every man has to seek salvation. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses were all entitled to eternal felicity and the love of God through his mercy and grace, for the good work each had carried out and for their ardent belief in him. Each was granted salvation. Certainly none but Adam was held responsible for Adam's sin.

Accordingly, the strange and difficult Christian concepts of God suffering, sacrificing himself, reproaching himself, and repenting are all alien to Islam. Not only do these notions seem quite incomprehensible to the Islamic way of thinking, but they actually constitute blasphemies. Why should God suffer? What would be the conditions beyond his control which would make him suffer? For such is Allāh's infinite kindness and generosity he would naturally forgive all those who had done wrong but later believed in him, repented and simply asked His forgiveness. It is unthinkable in Islam that Allāh the Almighty would have to sacrifice himself in order to redeem the sins of mankind vicariously.

> And whoever does evil or wrongs his soul then asks forgiveness of Allāh will find Allāh Forgiving, Merciful. (4:110)

Reproaching oneself or repenting after doing something wrong would imply the deed was done either without forethought, adequate knowledge, self-control or a proper judgement of the

circumstances. Only after the deed is done by a person with limited knowledge or on an impulse does he or she discover that it could have been done in a better way or not at all. To the Muslim, such notions of human fallibility can never apply to Allāh, whose knowledge, wisdom, power and infinitely exalted attributes are unlimited.

Bethman and others have claimed that God as conceived of in Islam is an unknown God, having an unconcerned absolutism and a detached arbitrariness; a mighty, irresponsible Being with whom nothing can prevail, who dwells perpetually in the terrors of earth, not in its gentleness and compassion.[33] But to read the Qur'ān deeply and with an open mind will show clearly how untrue these assertions are.

We are directed to look everywhere around us and to think, and also to reflect on our own selves.

> In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alteration of night and day, and the ships that run in the sea with what profits men, and the water that Allāh causes to come down from the sky, then gives life therewith to the earth after its death and spreads in it all (kinds of) animals, and the changing of the winds and the clouds made subservient between heaven and earth, there are surely signs for people who understand. (2:164)

> And when my servants ask you concerning Me, surely I am near. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me, so they should hear My call and believe in Me that they may be guided. (2:186)

> Allāh is the Patron of those who believe — He brings them out of darkness into light. (2:257)

Surely the verses rendered above as well as so many others in the Book illustrate Allāh's concern and care, infinite compassion, omniscience, benevolence and love, encompassing the entire universe.

Further evidence of Allāh's care and generosity towards every man and woman who believes is shown in the following interpretations:

> [Abraham said] The Lord and Cherisher of the Worlds Who created me then He guides me. And Who gives me to eat and

> drink. And when I am sick He heals me. And Who will cause me to die then give me life. And Who, I hope will forgive me my mistakes on the day of judgement. (26:78–82)

> Whoever does good, whether male or female, and is a believer, We shall certainly make him live a good life, and We shall certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did. (16:97)

To the Muslim it is quite alien to conceive of such epithets as arbitrary, irresponsible and capricious as ever applying to his Lord.

Allāh's blessings and bounties come to man not necessarily as a reward for his good work. They may even constitute a test. Harm may reach him as a divine punishment or as a reminder for his corrupt ways. Sometimes hardship may try the believer as a means for scrutinizing the sincerity of his faith. Numerous examples of such tests were imposed on the biblical prophets (Genesis). The Qur'ān has this to say:

> Every soul shall taste of death, and we test you by evil and good by way of trial, and to Us you will be returned. (21:35)

It is possible for man to evade some harm by ardent and sincere prayer since Allāh always graciously welcomes prayers and supplications but those who arrogantly turn away will inevitably sooner or later incur the deprivation of some of God's mercy and generosity, God's mercy being all-encompassing:

> And My mercy encompasses all things. So I ordain it for those who keep their duty and practise charity, and those who believe in Our messages. (7:156)

> Surely the mercy of Allāh is near to the doers of good. (7:56)

Man must realize how his knowledge, power and perception are circumscribed in many respects. He is still exploring the oceans of a planet which has been his home for millions of generations. Not a single natural phenomenon can he claim to have completely encompassed in his knowledge, while his senses are very limited in spectra. Despite these limitations some men have claimed fellowship with the Deity and have even denied Allāh his full right to control and maintain the universe he created the way he wants.

There are mortals who even go so far as to deny Allāh's existence, claiming themselves to be the masters of the universe which according to them is an accidental phenomenon that came about arbitrarily. Faced with the infinite wonders of creation how can man, with his limited scope, dare to measure the deeds of God and claim him to be arbitrary, irresponsible or capricious?

The Qur'ān teaches that man with his limited vision may imagine a thing to be good for him whereas in the long-run it may actually be bad, or vice versa. It is surely unreasonable that finite man should challenge Allāh who is infinite, as master and judge. For, to allege Allāh's capriciousness — a blasphemy to all Muslims — would be to imply man's fate as unpredictable, incurring blessing or doom unexpectedly. As we know, the Qur'ān stresses that man should expect only a just divine reward for his deeds or misdeeds.

Allāh's Love

Certain Orientalists have claimed that the Qur'ānic concept of God lacks holiness and love.[34] Just how false and groundless these assertions are is clearly demonstrated by those many Qur'ānic verses which show great kindness, mercy, generosity and care for every man and woman who believes. We may reflect on how Allāh's generosity multiplies his reward for the believer's good work (6:160), and how he forgives all the sins of the suppliant who humbly asks his pardon (39:56). Whoever does wrong or injustice to himself but then seeks the forgiveness of his Lord will find Him "Verily, Forgiving, Merciful" (4:110). Whoever does good to "himself and his fellow men" may expect a greatly multiplied reward. (73:20)

> And whatever of good you do to yourselves you will find it with Allāh — that is best and greatest in reward. And ask forgiveness of Allāh, surely Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful. (73:20)

Allāh, who loves man and is so kind, merciful and generous to him has assigned nature — everything in heaven and earth — to serve him.

> Allāh is He Who created the heavens and the earth and sent down water from the clouds, then brought forth with it fruits as a sustenance for you, and He has made the ships subservient to you that they may run upon the sea by His command, and He has made the rivers subservient to you. And He has made subservient to you the sun and the moon pursuing their courses; and He has made subservient to you the night and the day; and He gives you of all you ask of Him. And if you count Allāh's favours you will not be able to number them. Surely man is very unjust, very ungrateful. (14:32–34)

God's love, as explained in the Qur'ān, is boundless, even guiding man to love Him and showing man the way:

> Say, if you love Allāh, follow me, Allāh will love you and forgive your sins. (3:30)

> ... and do good, surely Allāh loves the doers of good. (2:195)

> Surely Allāh loves those who turn much (to Him) and He loves those who purify themselves. (2:222)

> Yea, whoever fulfills his promise and keeps his duty — then surely Allāh loves the dutiful. (3:75)

> And if you judge, judge between them with equity, surely Allāh loves the equitable. (5:42)

On the other hand, Allāh does not love the disbelievers, the unjust, the boastful, nor the mischief makers (*Sūrahs* 3:32,57; 4:5; 28:77).

It is the Muslim's love for his Lord which fills his heart and makes him shun every shameful deed. For the sake of his beloved Lord he does his best in benevolent work. The pious Muslim tries his utmost to be obedient to the laws of God, to the best of his ability, but the driving force behind his obedience is love. He realizes the tremendous bounties he enjoys from Allāh and feels overwhelmed with love and indebtedness for them. The Muslim would feel most ashamed to disobey his Lord in any of his orders, his love compelling him to be as good a servant as he can possibly be.

From Islamic history the Muslim knows the exemplary loving servants: Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad. But whereas much of the history surrounding the

others has been obscured by the thick mists of legend, the innumerable deeds and sayings of Muḥammad have remained well known and crystal clear facts. Consequently, the devout Muslim does his very best to imitate the Prophet Muḥammad, yet realizing that this is not at all easy. The Muslim's love for his Lord and the conviction of Allāh's love for him are rational, not involving him in any incomprehensible dogma. He is still no more than a servant of his Lord so would never imagine himself to be the son of God. He is certain that if he sincerely repents his sins will be forgiven out of Allāh's grace, clemency and kindness; there being no question of vicarious redemption but solely of individual accountability on the Last Day.

Among the exponents of Sufism who became enchanted with the love of God are al-Ghazāly, Thunnoun-al-Misry, Jalālud-Dīn Rūmi and Rābi'ah the celebrated woman mystic of the ninth century. Al-Ghazāly, who composed many beautiful essays on the theme of divine love, stated: "The reasonable and accepted view among people of insight is that God alone is worthy of true love."[35] Rābi'ah wrote: "Love for God has so absorbed me that neither love nor hate of any other being remains in my heart... Now, in the depth of the night, when every king has closed his doors and every lover is alone with his beloved, you, my Lord, are there who never shut thy door in anyone's face and welcomes suppliants."[36]

Chapter 10

Islam as defined in the Qur'ān

With Islam's all-embracing definition of submission to the will of God, those who believe are not limited to Muhammad and the people who received his message, but include everyone who has ever fulfilled the above definition at any point in history. Eminent examples are Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and all the prophets as well as the nations who followed their teachings. Thus, in the Book we read that every messenger sent by Allāh preached monotheism (21:25). A natural result is that Muslims believe in Allāh and all his messages revealed to the prophets before Muḥammad (2:136). The disciples of Jesus also submitted themselves to God so accordingly they, too, were Muslims (4:114).

Islam, which has shaped human history, far from being a faith of hopeless fatalism, rather appears as one which posits resistance to Satan as well as obedience to the one true God. At the same time, it is a faith which has nurtured mystics into declaring, "the secret of all created things is clear and thou dost not see in this world or the next aught beside God".[1] To this, Bishop Cragg added: "What respect for human intelligence could be higher than this? Islam made a clean sweep of all factors in the relation of God and man save good work and piety. Each owes his brother what he owes himself; no idol, no priest, no mediator remain."[2]

The universality of Islam

Although the Qur'ān was revealed and recorded in Arabic, as naturally were also the sayings of the Prophet, Islam, from its inception, has been intended as a world religion. Gibb stated that, "Islam never identified itself with the Arabs, although at times Arabs have identified themselves with it."[3]

Bell, Menezes, and Levy however, adopted the view that Islam was not in the beginning intended to be a universal religion.[4] They imagined it as a local religion tailored for Mecca and Mecca alone.[5] On the contrary, as demonstrated in even the earlier verses, both in revelation and in the Book, the message has been aimed as "A reminder for the worlds" (81:27), "Praise be to Allāh the Lord of the worlds" (1:1).

This point was discussed earlier in Chapter 3 and there is no need for repetition. It may just be added here that towards the completion of his mission, the Prophet sent embassies to neighbouring kings and rulers and to the emperors of the Persian and Byzantine Empires — the greatest countries known in his time — inviting them to take up Islam.[6]

The Islamic concept of Allāh is not that he is the Lord of only one specific nation or tribe, whether they be Muslim or Hebrew. He is the God and Lord not only of the believers but of the entire universe, the Lord of all the worlds, known and unknown. The concept could not be more all-encompassing. (6:90; 29:1). The religion of Islam not only embraces men and women of every race, colour and tongue but overwhelms whatever is in the heavens and the earth.

> Seek they other than Allāh's religion? And to Him has submitted whoever is in the heavens and the earth. (3:82)

The Islamic belief

Belief in Islam is a stage above mere mechanical submission. The believer's heart is convinced of Allāh's oneness, attributes, messages, prophets, angels, and Last Judgement. His belief permeates through his senses so that his work is benevolent and constructive,

his speech is gentle and objective and he is always seeking God's pleasure and love.

The faithful Muslim finds his happiness in fulfilling the rites out of obedience and love for Allāh, and his conduct in life is illuminated by Allāh's guidance as revealed in the Qur'ān; the perfect example set by the Prophet Muḥammad is always there for the faithful to imitate.

Muslims believe that all human beings are the descendants of Adam, whom Allāh created from dust, rather than random products of Darwinian evolution from fish or apes. Their conviction is that Allāh is absolutely capable of creating each of the species in existence in its present perfect form without any preceding experimentation or development (3:59).[7] Allāh's creation is meaningful, neither haphazard, fortuitous nor aimless; everything, every event taking place is encompassed by his omniscience (18:29; 53:38–62).

An integral part of the faith is the sublime purpose of this life beyond the physical needs and material activities of man. The Prophet was quoted by Ibn ʿAbbās to have defined the belief as "what has been established in the heart, and confirmed by the person's deeds".[8] This was derived from numerous Qur'ānic verses in which belief is repeatedly and closely coupled with righteous work (98:7).

Islamic rites

Islām is based on five pillars. The first and foremost is the declaration of the faith by bearing witness to the oneness of God and to Muḥammad being his prophet. The remaining four rites are: prayer, giving alms to the poor, fasting for the Arabic lunar month of Ramaḍān and, if able, going on pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime.

These rites cultivate nobility in the Muslim's heart and the remembrance of God stimulates his sense of morality. They augment his feelings of a real spiritual connection with Allāh and strengthen his bond with fellow Muslims — both in his limited congregation and in the vast international community. In the warmth of this spiritual brotherhood all barriers of race, colour and tongue melt and vanish.

The rites are mentioned many times in the Qur'ān but never collectively. Prayers and almsgiving are mentioned together quite often although only the principles of their application are laid down, (2:43, 153; 5:6). Ample details, however, are found in the Traditions of the Prophet and of his many companions under various circumstances of health, sickness, travelling, residence, shortage of water or abundance of the same.[9]

DECLARATION OF THE FAITH

Bearing witness to the truth that "There is no god but God" ("*La-ilaha illa-Allāh*) and that Muḥammad is His messenger is the spirit of Islam, and, Muslims believe, the spirit of every divine message to mankind.

> And We sent no messenger before you but We inspired him, (saying): There is no God save Me so worship Me. (21:25)

The Qur'ān repeatedly warns against polytheism which it condemns as the most grievous of sins.

> Lo! Allāh forgives not that a partner should be ascribed unto Him. He forgives (all) save that to whom He will. And whoso ascribes a partner to Allāh, he has indeed invented a tremendous sin. (4:48)

Some verses appeal to the reader's intellect and logic, asking him to ponder on how extremely wrong, ungrateful and unjust it would be to worship a being other than God. The other subject of worship could be anything, an idol, a person, one's family, property, or even a habit.

> Say: To whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth? Say: To Allāh. He has ordained mercy on Himself. He will certainly gather you on the Resurrection Day — there is no doubt about it. Those who have lost their souls will not believe. And to Him belongs whatever dwells in the night and the day and He is the Hearing, the Knowing.
> Say: Shall I take for a Patron other than Allāh, the Originator of the Heavens and the earth, and He provides food and is not fed? Say: I am commanded to be the first of those who submit and do not be of the polytheists. (6:12–14)

We note that the declaration of monotheism here is that Allāh is "the Lord" and is "the God". It is only He who is to be worshipped and only He who is the source of all good. Therefore only His help should be sought; being nearer to Him should be the believer's goal, His love the greatest comfort and joy to his heart. To Him alone Muslims pray and prostrate themselves, not to any mortal, not even to a pope, as is done by newly ordained bishops.[10]

Bearing witness to the fact that Muhammad was one of the messengers of God is testified to in the Qur'ān where he is described and referred to as the Prophet and as the messenger of God over a hundred times (e.g. 3:144; 4:170) The declaration that Muḥammad is the messenger of God is an integral part of the faith:

> Say: O mankind! I am the messenger of Allāh to you all, unto whom belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth. There is no God save Him. He quickens and He gives death. So believe in Allāh and His messenger, the illiterate Prophet who believes in Allāh and in His words and follow him that haply you may be led aright. (7:158)

PRAYERS *(AL-SALĀH)*

The importance of prayer in religion is well recognized. It strengthens the belief in the existence and goodness of Allāh and transmits this belief to the innermost recesses of the heart. When devoutly performed prayer uplifts the spirit, develops the mind, cultivates the conscience and comforts the soul. Furthermore, in the Islamic prayer every muscle joins with the soul and mind in the worship and glory of God. In Islam, every individual, man or woman, prays on his or her own behalf and communicates directly with Allāh who is the All-seeing, All-hearing. No clergy exists in Islam, nor is it needed. It is strongly recommended that prayers are said in congregation — particularly at noon on Friday. Otherwise, the individual's prayer on his own is valid anywhere so long as the place is clean. No temple, no offerings are necessary. In the Qur'ān the believers are asked not just to "say" but to "keep up and perfect" their prayers (2:277; 73:20).

Before starting his prayer the Muslim makes sure of his cleanliness by carrying out a prescribed ablution. This is similar to an Abrahamic Tradition which Jesus corroborated (Mark 7:3).[11] It

draws one's attention to one's own cleanliness both physical and spiritual. The Muslim says his prayers in a clean place, directing his face to the Ka'bah in Mecca and his heart to God, conscious of being a member of the universal brotherhood of Islam, all worshipping the one God in one and the same manner, facing in one direction, and when in a congregation, keeping in straight lines. Doing his best not to become distracted by his surroundings, he recites *Sūrah* 1 and some other verses; he kneels and prostrates himself to Allāh and praises Him. In his recitations he repeats the words of God, mindful of being in his presence. He is addressing Allāh, realizing that the Deity is with him, watching him, hearing him and responding to his supplications. His soul is at its peak of joy and he feels closest to Allāh when he is prostrating himself to Him in praise, and asking for His help and guidance. The significance of the Ka'bah in Islam was explained in Chapters 6 and 7. More will be said about it later.

He who keeps up prayers and humbly does his best to perfect them will be felicitous. He will acquire an angelic nature putting him high above those earthly temptations which can lead to misconduct and wrongdoing.

> Surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil; and certainly the remembrance of Allāh is the greatest (force), and Allāh knows what you do. (29:45)

> Felicitous indeed are the believers who are humble in their prayers, and who shun vain conversation, and who act for the sake of purity. (23:124)

For their high spiritual value the five daily prayers are very important in Islam. They should be said by every man or woman. Prayers are simplified for the traveller and for the sick but never waived because they are the spiritual connection between man and Allāh which must be maintained.

ORIENTALISTS' COMMENTS ON THE PRAYERS

There are several comments made by Orientalists on the number of the daily prayers, their value and the way they are said which warrant discussion.

Anderson vilified the Islamic prayer when he commented; "To a Muslim there is little connection between prayer and ethics; a man who rises from prayer to cheat will be rewarded for the prayer and punished for the cheating."[12] Anderson forgot that the reward for such a man may be reduced to nil for praying so insincerely. Were a Muslim to commit an immoral act so closely succeeding his devotions, it would only show how far his mind was from God. The Prophet was quoted by Ibn-Mass'ūd to have said that he whose prayers do not keep him away from indecency has no prayers.[13]

Incredibly, Zwemer tried to connect the act of prayer with animistic beliefs. He put forward such arguments as, "Muḥammad forbade prayers being made on or near watering places of camels because camels were created by devils."[14] Nobody, particularly Muslims, can believe in devils creating anything; it is only Allāh who is the Creator. The logical explanation is that the watering places of camels, with their dung, would not be clean enough places for the saying of prayers. Besides, who would choose such a spot when there is the vast, dry desert or wasteland, the clean shelter of the home or mosque in which to pray?

Bethman has completely missed the point of prayer when he imagined it as "a form of worship which has to be dutifully performed. It tends to make one a strict formalist, it hardens him to self-righteousness. It cannot be a spiritual intercourse between man and his Creator, as prayer really should be. There is no possibility of a heart to heart talk with a being who is utterly different."[15]

In Chapter 9 we saw how Allāh the Creator is different from his creatures yet close to their hearts, and how he kindly, lovingly and graciously hears and accepts their prayers. No doubt when any prayer is said mechanically without concentration it is likely to be void of feeling, becoming a mere formality. On the other hand, when I concentrate on my prayer to God Who created and maintains the world including myself, Who has encompassed everything with His knowledge and mercy, Who has overwhelmed me with His grace and care, Who sees me wherever I am, Who hears my voice and reads my mind, Who helps me and answers my supplications, such a prayer is a refreshing stimulation to my soul, a comfort to my spirit, a shining light in my heart.

Concerning the number of daily prayers, Levy and Watt, in their studies of Islam, found no "good" evidence to show that the

number of daily prayers had been definitely fixed at five during Muḥammad's lifetime, or even before the close of the century subsequent to his death.[16] Although this is true insofar as the exact number of prayers and the way in which they are said are not explained in detail in the Qur'ān, as mentioned above, the fact remains that all Qur'ānic regulations were thoroughly explained by the Prophet himself and devoutly applied by the early Muslim community from the moment the relevant verse was revealed. The five daily prayers were divinely instituted in Mecca some years prior to the Prophet's move to Medina, roughly thirteen years before his death. During this period he taught every minute detail to his followers who in turn taught others. The records of the Prophet's Traditions are rich in such details. All Qur'ānic regulations were expounded and elaborated down to the smallest detail in the books of *fiqh* so as to provide answers to the widest possible range of queries which might be addressed to the legist, "many of the points being casuistical in the extreme".[17]

"The Muslims' communal prayer in mosques" was thought by Friar Simon and Mark of Toledo "to be praises of Muhammad". This is one of the more incredible notions about Islam fostered in the Middle Ages.[18]

This notion is unfortunately still entertained by some misinformed people in the West. Menezes was to put forward a similarly absurd notion: "Muhammad constructed a pulpit, it became an object of great sanctity to Muhammedans." He wrote, "from this pulpit Muḥammad turning towards the Kaabah, would conduct the services, deliver discourses on Fridays and after performing the prescribed prostrations would recite portions of the Quran... If a man were to wash his left hand or his nose before his teeth his prayer becomes useless... and it is not necessary that the worshipper should understand the words of the prayer."[19] This shows how misinformed writers could deceive their readers, to say the very least.

How different from the above conjectures were the admiring remarks of one Pennis who visited Jerusalem in the Middle Ages: "In the likeness of monks, they [Muslims] pray exceedingly in a very ordered way... Wherever they are on the earth at certain hours of the day, with bended knees and prostrated to earth, they adore God devoutly." And in the words of his contemporary Ricoldo: "And what indeed shall I say of their prayer? So great is their devotion that I was astonished when I saw it and proved it

by experience."[20] Much later Gairdner and Guillaume were to note as most striking in Muslims the air of quiet, of total absorption in the devotional task and entire aloofness from their circumstances.[21]

ALMS (*AL-ZAKĀH*)

The Qur'ānic word *zakāh* not only has the meaning of charity, alms, tithe, kindness, official tax and voluntary contribution, but it also has strong spiritual and moral motives.[22] The literal meaning of the word is "purity".

The way the Qur'ān induces the well-off to give alms is most courteous yet firm. They are invited to pay out of what Allāh has provided them with — their wealth being only temporarily under their control while on earth. If they give the poor their due, God will pay them back many times over with blessings in this world and the next. Almsgiving is sometimes represented in the Qur'ān as a transaction between man, who is temporary, who was created and granted, and Allāh who is the Permanent, the Generous — Who creates and owns everything. Man gives to his fellow man and Allāh, the Gracious, pays him back in abundance (57:11–13; 73:20).

> Who is it that will lend Allāh a goodly loan so He multiplies it to him manifold? And Allāh withholds and extends and to Him you shall be returned. (2:245)

Muslims are enjoined to give alms and the injunction is usually associated with the maintenance of prayers, as emphatically stated in numerous verses (2:177; 8:3; 22:41; 98:5). The act of *zakāh* purifies the remaining substance by blessings and purifies the soul from the pollution of avarice and greed. It is also called *ṣadaqāt* because it proves man's sincerity (*ṣidq*) in his faith and devotion to Allāh.

Following the Qur'ānic instructions, Muslims take care to give from the average or best quality of what they have. Some of their sins can be expiated by sincere almsgiving.

> Allāh will not call you to account for that which is vain in your oaths but He will call you to account for the making of deliber-

> ate oaths; so its expiation is the feeding of ten poor people with the average you feed your families with, or their clothing or the freeing of a neck. But whoso finds not (the means) should fast for three days. (5:89)

> . . . and aim not at the bad to spend thereof, while you would not take it yourselves unless you connive at it. And know that Allāh is self-sufficient, praiseworthy. (2:267)

This is in contrast with the "gleanings" and the "fallen fruit of thy vineyard" to be disposed to the poor and the stranger (Lev. 19:10).

The tradition among the pious Muslims has been to give alms from the best they have in order to evade the slightest humiliation or injury to the feelings of the recipient. Although the Qur'ān indicates the various categories of needy people who are eligible it does not set the minimum amounts of obligatory alms under every particular condition (9:60). These, however, were clearly explained by the Prophet, and they are to be found recorded in Islamic literature. Overlooking the wealth of information about the details of *zakāh*, some writers such as Levy have asserted there were no instructions specifying how or in what amounts the rate should be paid.[23]

These rules of almsgiving, as faithfully applied by the early Muslims and those in the Middle Ages, were greatly admired by Ricoldo de Monte Croce who noted in his *Itinerarium*: "On the subject of pity for the poor it ought to be known that Muslims are most generous of alms."[24] Seven centuries later Sale pointed out: "The earlier generations of the Muslims esteemed almsdeeds to be highly meritorious and many of them have been illustrious in the exercise thereof, Hasan the grandson of Muhammad, in particular, is related to have thrice in his life divided his substance between himself and the poor and twice to have given away all he had. The generality are so addicted to the doing of good that they extend their charity even to brutes."[25]

FASTING (*AL-SAWM*)

Muslims believe that fasting has been a divine injunction in every heavenly religion. Some philosophies adopt it as a form of discipline. The Islamic fast means a complete abstention from food,

drink, smoking, and sexual intercourse, and refraining as much as possible from profane deeds, speech or thought between dawn and sunset. The institution of fasting in Islam has an exalted aim which is very briefly described in the Qur'ān: "That you may guard against evil" (2:183). It teaches man to observe fasting not for the sake of his health, nor in sign of mourning but out of deep love and active devotion for Allāh alone, hoping to please Him. Thus fasting cultivates a vigilant and sound conscience because the Muslim keeps his fast in secret as well as in public — there being no worldly authority to check whether he breaks it or not. It also indoctrinates man in patience and unselfishness, strengthens his feeling of belonging to a worldwide Muslim fraternity, and is an effective exercise in moderation and will power. Fasting helps man's soul become more transparent, his mind become clearer and his body become healthier and lighter so as to move and act. It is a divine prescription for man's self-reassurance, self-control and dignity.

It is thus considered one of the most meritorious works in Islam because it can be kept a secret between the believer and Allāh. No one else need know. He is fasting only out of love for his Lord and in obedience to him. In certain verses fasting is mentioned with reference to sincere repentance for wrongdoing such as the breach of an oath, in certain marital problems and in some cases while on pilgrimage (2:196; 4:89; 58:4).

Concerning the method of fasting in Islam, Sale claimed, "Muḥammad seemed to have followed the guidance of the Jews in his ordinance concerning fasting"[26], forgetting the fact that the origin of both ordinances was divine. Bethman, on the other hand, rightly observed: "The Islamic fast differs widely from its Jewish and Christian predecessors. It is not an abstinence from certain kinds of food, but a complete abstinence from any food or drink including water, from smoking or any other stimulant during daytime."[27] Those unable to fast are enjoined to make up for it by giving food away in charity.

PILGRIMAGE (*AL-ḤAJJ*)

Pilgrimage is a religious duty incumbent on every Muslim man or woman who is physically, mentally and financially able to perform it once in a lifetime. "In the course of the sacred journey by

carrying out the prescribed rites, pilgrims gather in the greatest annual conference of peace known in the history of mankind. In the course of *ḥajj* peace is the dominant theme; peace with one's soul, peace with one another, peace with the animals, plants and even insects. Such a total overwhelming peace is to be found on pilgrimage despite the fact that the multitude of pilgrims of all ages come from various walks of life and the widest spectrum of backgrounds. Kings, clerks and cobblers; presidents, princes and porters; professors, peasants, students and shopkeepers, of all races, colours and tongues, all mingle together in a divinely bonded brotherhood. With the simplest white garment for every man and woman, there is no aristocracy but equality, humility and devotion. There is no royalty but loyalty of all to God."[28]

The sole aim of the pilgrim's journey is to please Allāh, to devoutly carry out the rites and to visit the first house ever built on earth for the worship of Him alone — the Ka'bah in Mecca.

> Certainly the first house appointed for men is the one at Bakkah (Mecca) blessed and a guidance for the nations. In it are clear signs: (It is) the Place of Abraham; and whoever enters it is safe; and pilgrimage to the House is a duty which people owe to Allāh — whoever can find a way to it. And whoever disbelieves surely Allāh is above need of the worlds. (3:95–96)

The rite of pilgrimage was instituted in the time of Abraham. He and his son Ishmael had built the Ka'bah out of devotion for Allāh, and Abraham had placed with his own hands the Black Stone in one of the corners of the building. Today it is the only original stone surviving and still in its very same place. No other part of the building has survived the erosion of time and weather and the numerous rebuildings and restorations ordered by successive rulers. The close association between Abraham, the earliest exemplary monotheist, and the Black Stone was highly esteemed by the Prophet and the Muslim nation; when a pilgrim kisses or touches it he is overwhelmed by a feeling of awe and wonder at this meeting point where the distant past and present fuse in a timeless moment.[29]

Among the rites of pilgrimage is the walking between two hills, Ṣafa and Marwa, in remembrance of Hagar's desperate search for water for her baby and herself, praying earnestly all the while. Her prayers were answered when a spring of water suddenly

started gushing nearby. That spring of fresh water, called Zemzem, so blessed and so vitally precious in the desert land, has never dried up ever since those far-off times. Another rite of pilgrimage is the full day of prayer, meditation and supplication on the part of the pilgrim on Mount 'Arafāt. Here the Prophet gave his farewell sermon, not far from the site where Abraham almost sacrificed his son. This highly significant day is counted as the peak of the pilgrimage.

Is it not unfortunate that so many Orientalists have misinterpreted the Muslim's veneration of the Ka'bah, the Black Stone and the pilgrimage rites as a whole, imagining them as some kind of idol worship[30], or dismissing the rites as silly, ridiculous or merely the relics of idolatrous superstition? Another faulty assumption is that the rites of pilgrimage were remnants of a pre-Islamic cult included by the Prophet in an attempt to reconcile the idolatrous Meccans with the faith.[31] A few writers of the Middle Ages have even claimed that the Ka'bah contained the Prophet's body, like the relics of a Christian saint.[32]

Such comments simply show how little these Orientalists knew about pilgrimage and the historical background of its rites. Despite their somewhat feeble grasp of the subject matter it is noticeable how strong their prejudices were against this significant rite. Writers who distort facts should be shown up and condemned, although the general public, with the inadequate information available, may be excused when they judge Islam by whatever they see or read about the behaviour of Muslim communities or individuals. The behaviour or rather, misbehaviour, of a person or a group can sometimes be in marked contrast with what the faith teaches. People, moreover, are understandably apt to judge the faith by the behaviour of its exponents.

Contrast between Islam and Muslims

In the Prophet's time and in the first subsequent generation most of the Muslim community lived according to the precepts of Islam. These are very comprehensive, covering every detail of life — religious observance, family, social, economical, political,

cultural and other aspects of daily life, as well as international, national and tribal relations.

As centuries passed, bringing about the expansion of the Muslim commonwealth and the tremendous growth of its resources, with various new nations joining the community and bringing with them their different backgrounds, heritages and philosophies, it was inevitable that some differences should develop between the Muslims' behaviour and the teachings of Islam. There were individuals, subjects, rulers and nations who, though they bore Muslim names acted in ways utterly at odds with Qur'ānic precepts. Cleavages developed into cracks reaching the gigantic proportions of craters.

It is through Allāh's grace that the Qur'ān remains today exactly the same as when it was revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad fourteen centuries ago. Under its glistening light the conduct of Muslim individuals or groups can be compared with the exalted precepts set forth in a language as clear today as it was then. Islam enjoins honourable conduct, charity, kindness, steadfastness, cleanliness and purity of thought. It prohibits every kind of misbehaviour, cheating, treachery, drinking intoxicants and gambling. Alas! How many Muslims nowadays live according to these rules? How many Islamic countries refrain from attacking each other? How many Muslims still remain illiterate? How many are still involved in dogmatic superstitions despite the teachings of their sacred Book, the first revelation of which commenced with the command "Read"?

The average person in the West who gets to know Muslim customs either through contact with them or by reading or hearing about them may very well be excused if he imagines that any kind of low life is allowed, encouraged or even enjoined by Islam. In fact it is absolutely condemned. But how could the rational Westerner get to know what Islam truly teaches? Of course to see or to read about present-day Muslims is the easiest way. Unfortunately, altogether too many of these give a completely distorted picture of the truth. They are most likely to present an unhappy, pathetic spectacle, being poor, sick or illiterate. Many Islamic countries are backward, corrupt, less than clean. Many are troubled by sectarian differences. The Sunnis, the Shiites, the Ismailis, the 'Alawis, the Aḥmadis, the Qadianis and others do not exclusively follow the religious teachings of the Qur'ān in their everyday practice but have allowed extraneous elements to create some-

times serious differences.[33] So where should the rational open-minded Westerner go to seek after the truth about Islam? The answer is simple: to read the Qur'ān in the best translation available. There the original star remains twinkling and brilliant despite the thick clouds of misbehaviour raised by its followers.

Chapter 11

The Qur'ānic Attitude towards other Religions

The Qur'ān classifies people into three categories, namely: Muslims; the other monotheists, who are referred to as the people of the Book; and the rest of mankind. The people of the Book are the Christians and Jews, who both believe in the same God as the Muslims and who received their respective sacred Books from Him. The Qur'ān lays down the norms of conduct towards each group.

As mentioned earlier, the Muslims firmly believe in the messages delivered from God by Moses and Jesus. They honour them greatly, as well as the rest of the earlier prophets, even more than do the present versions of the Bible.

Qur'ānic record of the earlier prophets

The Qur'ānic version of the history of biblical and other prophets has aroused diverse comments. Watt, insisting on the postulate that the revelations were nothing more than the "product of a creative imagination" exclaimed: "In particular there is at least one point at which the Qur'ānic ideas seem to be unsound, the idea

that revelation or the product of creative imagination is superior to normal human traditions as a source of bare historical facts."[1] Is it not well known that historical facts were frequently embellished with several layers of legends of different hues by various historians?

On the other hand, the divine account of the historical facts as presented in the Qur'ān is the standard against which the level of truth in other accounts can be measured. Understandably, this could be accepted by neither Jeffery, Anderson nor Sale[2], when they asserted that the Prophet composed the Qur'ān with an unclear picture of biblical history. In the following paragraphs we will look at the subject matter in a purely objective way, so that we may compare the Qur'ānic record of certain historical facts with other versions of the same.

Objective writers such as Bethman admired the Qur'ānic account of Jesus and said: "Islamic sources picture Jesus as a highly exalted being, having entered this world in an exceptional and miraculous way, having been protected from the touch of Satan and endowed with powers not granted to other human beings. When the time came he was permitted to leave this world in the similar miraculous manner."[3] To this Parrinder added some detail: "The Qur'ān has great reverence for Jesus, whom it calls Son of Mary, Messiah, Prophet, Word and servant of God, and spirit from Him. The annunciation to Mary of the birth of Jesus is recounted twice and closely resembles that in Luke's Gospel. The manner of the conception rests entirely on the will of God. He says: 'Be! And it is.'"[4]

In the Qur'ān the miracles of Jesus are mentioned, but the Crucifixion is denied, yet not the Ascension. The Jews could not kill the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, "they slew him not, ... but God raised him to Himself." (4:157)

Even among the Christian accounts of Jesus we note many discrepancies and contradictions, some of which deny the Resurrection itself — the crucial dogma for others. "Christians need not affirm that Christ rose from the dead at all. The Resurrection was considered by some to have only symbolic value in that it emphasizes newness and spiritual rebirth, but so far as concerns its having literal historical significance it has become excess baggage for most."[5] As if what was essentially true in the past is no longer necessary in the present. So which is the pure, unchanging truth?

The narrative of Jesus as reported in the four Gospels still con-

tains sufficient support for the Islamic claim that he was a highly honoured servant and Apostle of Allāh but nonetheless not divine Jesus said:

> I do nothing of myself. (John 8:28).
> The Lord our God is one Lord. (Mark 17:29)
> God . . . glorified His servant Jesus. (Acts 3:13).

The vital point as put by Mufassir[6] is that the biblical expression "Son of God" cannot be said to have ever come, authentically, from the lips of Jesus himself. According to Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*[7], "Whether Jesus used it to Himself is doubtful." We do, on the contrary, read of him referring to himself as "Son of Man". (Matthew 12:32; Mark 9:9; Luke 17:24; John 5:27) The Qur'ān definitely clarifies the point.

> Jesus the son of Mary was no more than an Apostle of Allāh and His Word which He bestowed on Mary and a spirit proceeding from Him. (4:171)

He considered himself as coming to this world to deliver a divine message, good tidings to the believers and a warning to the disbelievers (e.g. Luke 17). His contemporary followers as well as some of those of subsequent generations considered him as a man and an Apostle of God. (3:53).

"Talmudic blasphemies against Jesus constituted the other extreme to the Qur'ānic praise of him."[8] While St Luke (Luke 2:14) related Jesus to David through Joseph, St John and St Paul did not refer to the birth of Jesus. The Qur'ān however, emphasizes his miraculous birth without a father and no less emphatically hails the sanctity of the Virgin Mary.[9] On the Crucifixion Lane pointed out that, "the Basilidians in the very beginning of Christianity denied that Christ himself suffered but Simon the Cirene was crucified in his place"[10], which is generally supported by the relevant Qur'ānic verses. (*Sūrah* 5)

The Qur'ānic record of the biblical prophets shows them in an equally bright light. They were chosen by Allāh, perfected and blessed by him. They were true to their trust in Allāh and were splendid examples of moral conduct, obeying Allāh's commands and exemplifying what they taught:

> Peace be unto Noah among the peoples. Lo! thus do We reward the good. Lo! he is one of the believing servants. (37:75–81)

This is in direct contrast to the biblical scene in which Noah is described as getting drunk and then cursing one of his sons.[11]

Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob are described in several places in the Qur'ān as noble, generous, devout, uncompromising monotheists, blessed, divinely guided and most truthful (37:109–113; 6:85–87). Yet, the present versions of the Bible describe Abraham as habitually consulting the stars.[12] He and Isaac are related to have told lies about their wives (Gen. 20:26). Jacob is also denounced as an untruthful man who deceived his aged, blind father by pretending to be his brother, and stole his father's blessings (Gen. 27).

In the Qur'ān Lot is saluted as a prophet of God, blessed and noble. Allāh saved him and all his family except his wife from the divine wrath which fell on Sodom. Lot had done his utmost to get his people to give up their obscene habits (37:133–136). This picture of him and his faithful daughters in no respects blends with the biblical allegations of his drunkenness and lying with them — fathering children incestuously — without even a comment from him (Gen. 19). Similar calumnies are levelled against David (II Samuel 2) whom the Qur'ān upholds as a blameless servant of God.

The drastic differences between some of the earthly, sordid pictures of biblical prophets as cited in the present day Bible, and the ideal descriptions of them in the Qur'ān prove two things. Firstly, the Book was not written by the Prophet Muḥammad after he had learnt from Christian or Jewish sources as alleged by several Orientalists.[13] This corroborates the conclusions reached in Chapter 2. Secondly, that the Qur'ān was revealed by Allāh who chose his prophets and made them pious, honourable men of noble behaviour. Thus the Qur'ān, the word of God, sheds off every slanderous allegation against His prophets.

According to the Qur'ān, the Muslims and the people of the Book are permitted to eat each others' food which is *ḥalāl* for them. Muslim men are allowed to marry women of the Book (5:6). Christians and Jews have complete freedom to worship in their respective churches and synagogues. They are even enjoined to apply the divine rules which they received from God (5:50,71). Furthermore, the pious among the people of the Book, not necessarily their clergy, are highly praised in the Qur'ān (3:113).

Islamic attitude towards Christians and the Bible

The first example for showing kindness and tolerance towards Christians was set by the Prophet when, about the year 683, he granted the monks of St Catherine near Mount Sinai, and all the Christians, a charter "which has been justly designated as one of the noblest monuments of enlightened tolerance that the history of the world has produced. By it the Prophet secured to the Christians privileges and immunities which they did not possess even under sovereigns of their own creed."[14] He undertook himself, and enjoined his followers, to protect the Christians, to defend their churches, the residences of their priests and to guard them from all injuries. They were not to be unfairly taxed. No Christian was to be forced to reject his religion, no monk was to be expelled from his monastery, no pilgrim was to be deterred from his pilgrimage. Christian women married to Muslims were to enjoy their own religion and not to be subjected to compulsion or annoyance of any kind on that account. Should the Muslims be engaged in hostilities with outside Christians, no Christian resident among the Muslims should be treated with contempt on account of his creed. The Prophet declared that any Muslim violating or abusing what was therein ordered should be regarded as violator of God's testament.

The sincere brotherly relationship existing between Muslims and Christians has many happy instances; when the earliest Muslims fled from the Meccans' harsh and relentless persecution the first haven of refuge they sought was in Christian Abyssinia. The victory of Christian Byzantium over Zoroastrian Persia was hailed by Muslims and is recorded in the Qur'ān (30:1–6).

The kindness and graciousness shown by the Muslim state towards Christian subjects was admired by many writers.[15] In truth, Christians were much safer in the Islamic Empire than under the rule of their co-religionists in Byzantium who happened not to conform to all points in the accepted dogmas.[16]

Tales of certain fanatical Christians in the Middle Ages travelling to Islamic countries, even entering mosques to preach Christianity — hoping thereby to end up as martyrs — were reported by

Daniel.[17] A group of these zealots were graciously received by the Sultan who merely commiserated with them on their poverty stricken state and condition of mental unbalance resulting, he surmised, from an excess of fasting.

In shocking contrast, the Crusaders who came to "save" Jerusalem from the Saracens for the sake of Jesus, dashed the brains of young children against the walls; men were roasted at fires, some were ripped up to see if they had swallowed gold, thousands of Jews were driven into their synagogues and there burnt and the Pope's legate was seen partaking in the triumph! In Gibbon's words, "No wild beasts are so hostile to man as Christian sects in general are to one another."[18]

H.G. Wells related other stains on Christian history: "With fire and sword Charlemagne (771–814) preached the Gospel of the cross to the Saxons, Bohemians and as far as the Danube into what is now Hungary; he carried the same teaching down the Adriatic coast."[19]

The Jewish rulers were no less cruel. Dhu-Nowās of Yemen in the fifth century threw Christian martyrs into a trench filled with burning material. The number of victims were stated by Muir to have been no less than 20,000. At least as horrible was the persecution for various reasons of their Jewish subjects by Christian sovereigns; one being the Jews' alleged guilt in the crucifying of Christ. "Their children were liable to be torn from their arms, their goods plundered, at the will of the baron, the bishop or the frenzied populace."[20] This state of things lasted until the close of the seventeenth century. Therefore, "to the Jews outside Arabia the Muslim conquest was probably an unmixed blessing."[21]

In the Middle Ages Christians used to be prohibited from inviting "those who attacked Christianity by their rules of purity in food" to their homes or even from eating with them.[22] In the early fourteenth century a canon of the church forbade Christian princes from allowing the Islamic call to prayer on their territories.[23]

The frequently repressive treatment of Christian or Jewish rulers of old towards their Muslim subjects was in striking contrast to the kindly attitude of Muslim rulers towards their religious minorities.

What happened to the Jewish communities around Medina

There were three Jewish clans living in and around Medina, the Bani-n-Naḍīr, the Bani Qainoqā' and the Bani-Quraiḍhah. A village called Khaibar, not far from Medina, was also predominantly Jewish. Before the advent of Islam the Jews, with their sacred Book, felt justifiably superior to their neighbours who were idolators. They used to boast to the Arabs telling them, "We have a Biblical prophecy that a Prophet will appear. We will follow him, fight with him and conquer all of you."[24] The Jews were referring to Deuteronomy (18:18), which reads: "I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee; and I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." This verse, however, could be interpreted as referring to a prophet like Moses, who would appear among the brethren of the Israelites, that is the Ishmaelites. And so, when this prophecy was fulfilled by Muḥammad appearing among the children of Ishmael in Mecca, most of the Jewish community refused to believe in him, denied the prophecy and claimed the expected prophet could not come from outside their clans.[25] This is recorded in the Qur'ān (2:89–91).

Although at first they seemed friendly, many Jewish rabbis and leaders later became among the Prophet's bitterest enemies.[26] They contacted the idolators of Mecca and elsewhere, encouraging them and offering to help them against Muḥammad and his small but growing group of believers (4:51).

In the meantime the Arabs in Medina were divided into two tribes, al-'Auss and al-Khazraj, between whom friction and fighting had been going on for generations. When the Prophet arrived he initiated an atmosphere of peace and co-operation which included all the inhabitants — both Arabs and Jews. He forged a brotherhood between the Medinans and the war among the tribes was brought to an end. He also fostered a brotherhood between al-Muhājerīn (the Meccan immigrants) and al-'Anṣār (the Medinan Muslims). This brotherhood in faith was of superlative strength, almost stronger than some family ties.

Soon after the Prophet's arrival he proclaimed an edict which was adopted by all the inhabitants of Medina and its suburbs.[27] It

defined the privileges and duties of each community. There were about twenty articles in this constitution dealing with various aspects of the relations of the believers with one another and with the rest of the citizens, while about fifteen articles treated the rights of the Jews.[28]

Those of the Jewish scholars and rabbis who were impartial enthusiastically welcomed the Prophet in Medina, and declared their conversion to Islam, thereafter as disciples recognizing him as their master.[29] Among these scholars we read the names of 'Abdullāh-ben-Salām who became one of the close friends of the Prophet, and later, Ka'b-el-'Aḥbār.

Unfortunately, the majority of the Jewish community adopted a hostile and antagonistic attitude, defying Muḥammad and never recognizing him. Led by the two rabbis, Rāfi'-ben-Ḥoraimelah and Wahb-ben-Zeid, they "signalized themselves by offensive sneers and poor epigrams against the Prophet" and against the Muslim community as a whole.[30] With the aim of shaking the belief of the new Muslims, they spread malicious rumours and denounced the Prophet as an imposter. Rāfi', for instance, taunted: "Oh Muḥammad, if you are an apostle of God as you claim, then ask God to come and speak unto us."[31] The Qur'ān records such acts of defiance (2:116). While the other rabbi sneered: "Oh Muḥammad! Bring down to us a written book on a sheet from heaven so that we may read it, or turn this land into gardens, springs and streams."[32] Yet another denounced the Prophet as being in error and sarcastically invited him to be guided by accepting Judaism (2:135).

The influence of poets in those days would correspond closely to that of a powerful radio station or newspapers of wide circulation in today's society.

Ka'b-ben-'Ashraf, the outspoken Jewish poet in Medina, concentrated on composing colourful poems denigrating the Prophet and his followers. He wrote other poems inducing the disbelievers to fight the Prophet and still others humiliating Muslim ladies. Travelling to Mecca and other places where fairs were held he used to recite these poems and even went so far as to draw up a treaty with several of their delegates. "By their treaty with the Meccans each party was bound to oppose Muḥammad as long as life lasted."[33]

Some Jewish rabbis and leaders such as Ben-Saloul had ostensibly accepted the new faith though actually remaining as allies of

the enemy tribe of the Quraish and others in an attempt to undermine the Muslim community from within (2:8–19).

It should not be forgotten that Medina was then emerging as an embryonic state, continuously threatened from all directions by the Quraish and their allies. It need not be over-emphasized that when any state is at war traitors and mischief makers have to be taken seriously. The majority of the Jewish clans in and around Medina had never honoured their covenant which was included in the constitution declared by the Prophet soon after his arrival. We have seen how a number of their rabbis, notables and some of their poets behaved. Without doubt the Prophet had shown "long endurance of their jibes but a more serious step had to be taken."[34]

THE BANI–QAINOQĀ'

This tribe was established in one of Medina's districts, and had joined in the war of rumours and mischief making both in secret and openly against the Muslims. In the district of Bani-Qainoqā' was located a jewellery market comprising a cluster of small goldsmiths' shops. One morning a Muslim lady happened to be there shopping. A group of young Jewish men, out to make mischief, humiliated this unfortunate lady, exposing parts of her body. Their rash action immediately led to a fight with the lady's male companion whom they murdered.[35]

When the Prophet and his followers hurried to investigate the matter they were met with defiance by the Jewish leaders, who challenged them: "If you could win a battle against the Quraishis, you will see what kind of fighters we are."[36] Deeply angered, the Prophet ordered a siege laid on them. The siege continued for fifteen days and nights, until one of the Jewish chiefs, Ben-Saloul — who had ostensibly embraced Islam — came to the Prophet to intercede for the rebels. The siege was raised in response to their surrender but the Prophet ordered all of them — men, women and children — to leave Medina within three days, taking all their belongings. Once more Ben-Saloul tried to intercede on their behalf, pleading for forgiveness and permission to remain but the Muslims prevented him from reaching the Prophet and the Bani-Qainoqā' were compelled to leave.

THE BANI-N-NAḌĪR

This clan was living in the outskirts of Medina. They too had made a covenant with the Prophet to be his allies, to help him against his enemies and to contribute in case of financial difficulty. In return they would be entitled to all the privileges outlined earlier in this section.

Another polytheistic tribe, the Bani-'Āmer, were also allies. They lived at some distance from the city. It happened that one of their chiefs had accepted Islam and he requested the Prophet to send a delegation to introduce the new faith to the rest of his tribe. Forty companions were delegated for this purpose but, alas, treachery was in the wind; the chief's hostile nephew was out for blood. On his orders the forty companions were intercepted and captured by his army. Taken completely by surprise they could offer little resistance and were all killed except for two who managed to escape. On their way back, one of the fugitives came across two 'Āmerī men and killed them in revenge for the death of his thirty-eight friends. He did not realize that by this action he had violated the treaty between the Prophet and the Bani-'Āmer.

The Prophet, a model in just and upright behaviour, did not deny the Bani-'Āmer the blood money for their two men mistakenly killed, nor did he include it as a punishment for the murder of his thirty-eight friends. He tried to raise the necessary amount from the Muslim community in Medina and from his allies, the Bani-n-Naḍīr, whom he went to visit. Members of the tribe asked him to wait outside the high wall surrounding their territory. While they pretended to be bringing the money for him a man named 'Amr-ben-Gahhash climbed to the top of the wall in an attempt to kill Muḥammad by dropping a heavy stone on him.[36] Sensing danger just in time, the Prophet was inspired to hurl himself clear. Going to the mosque he issued a command ordering the Bani-n-Naḍır to collect their belongings and prepare to leave Medina within ten days' time. This they refused and taking up arms, they prepared to fight. Once again, the Prophet ordered a siege laid to their fortified part of Medina. Meanwhile their rabbi Ben-Saloul and his band of hypocrites enthusiastically urged the rebels to fight, offering to help. This incident is recorded in *Sūrah* 59.

> Have you not seen the hypocrites saying to their disbelieving brethren among the people of the Book: "If you are expelled we too go out with you and we will never hearken to anyone in your affair and if you are attacked surely we will help you, but Allāh is witness that they are indeed liars. If they are expelled, never will they go out with them, and if they are attacked they will never help them, and if they do help them they will turn their backs so they will receive no help." (59:11–12)

Fifteen days later the rebels surrendered. The siege was raised and loading 600 camels with their belongings, the Bani-n-Naḍīr departed for Khaibar some seventy miles away.

THE BANI-QURAIḌHAH

These were another tribe living in a fortified district on the city outskirts. They also had given their covenant to the Prophet, pledging to help in the war against the disbelievers and to prevent them from entering Medina. The chief who represented the Bani-Quraiḍhah and swore the oath to the Prophet was named Ka'b-ben-Sa'īd el-Quraiḍhy. Despite this covenant, the Jews sent deputations everywhere denouncing the "imposter".[37] They had secretly pledged a bond with the Meccan disbelievers at the Ka'bah by which the parties were bound to oppose Muḥammad as long as any of them were alive.

The Quraishis asked them: "O you Jews are the people of the Early Book and know about our disagreement with Muḥammad. Is our religion better or his?" The Jewish leaders answered: "Surely your religion is better than his and you are closer to the truth." (4:51).

The Jews had also succeeded in stirring up the tribes of the neighbouring provinces of Ghaṭafān, Asad and Solaim. In March 627, the Jews now allied with the Meccans and the great Bedouin tribes, in all 10,000 strong under Abu-Sufyān were ready to invade Medina.[38] Meanwhile, several Jewish dignitaries, after lengthy negotiations, had persuaded their leader Ka'b-ben-Sa'īd to break his covenant with the Prophet.

When Muḥammad heard that the Quraish and their allies were preparing an assault on Medina he and his companions knew they must act fast. It was decided to dig a deep ditch around the city

from three sides, leaving the fourth where the Bani-Quraiḍhah's fortress stood. By the terms of the covenant this tribe had pledged to repel any enemy who might attempt to invade through their territory. Night and day the Muslims laboured digging the trench wide and deep. Shortly before the allied enemy army appeared it was completed. They were astonished to see the defensive trench — the first in their experience. It effectively impeded their assault on Medina. They camped on the other side and exchanged bow-shots with the defenders. A few of the more daring who succeeded in leaping the trench on horseback were killed in the attempt.

The Prophet suspected that the Bani-Quraiḍhah might not keep the covenant but still he wanted to make sure. He sent a few eminent Medinan Muslims including Sa'd-ibn-Mu'ādh and Sa'd-ibn-'Obādah, who were among the best friends of the Quraiḍhi leaders. When they arrived at the Quraiḍhy fortress and opened discussion the delegates were shocked at the response: "Who is the apostle of God?" the Quraiḍhi leaders shouted. "There is no covenant nor even a promise between us and Muḥammad!"[39] At this, Sa'd-ibn-Mu'ādh was infuriated. He exchanged insults with them but his companions dissuaded him from going further, pointing out how serious the situation had now become. Returning back to the battlefront they informed the Prophet secretly of the Quraiḍhis' treachery.

But divine providence was at hand. One dark night a gale blew up. Torrential rain pelted the enemy encampment and put out their fires. The howling wind blew down some of the tents, causing the horses and camels to stampede. The Quraishi army and their allies were in utter confusion and their hearts were filled with gloom and fear. The confrontation with the ditch had been bad enough but this clear evidence of divine wrath proved their final undoing. By sunrise of the next day they had all fled. And so by the advent of the miraculous storm the battle was ended without the need for any full-scale fighting.

In the afternoon the Prophet went to the Bani-Quraiḍhah to demand an explanation. In answer the Jews barricaded their fortress and donned their armour. And so, for the third time, the Prophet gave orders for a siege to be laid. This continued for twenty-five days. In the end a message was dispatched to Sa'd-ibn-Mu'ādh, requesting his intercession. But Sa'd was mortally wounded and had to be carried from his home to the site where the Prophet was directing operations.

Sa'd-ibn-Mu'ādh asked the Prophet and the Jewish leaders whether they would accept his verdict whatever the outcome. Both parties agreed. Then the terrible verdict was pronounced. "The men should be executed whereas the women and children should be spared and enslaved and their properties confiscated."[40] The verdict was terrible but just. The sentence was carried out and was justified by "the treasonable activities of the Bani-Quraidhah" during a most critical period lived through by the Medinan community.[41] It was similar but not so harsh as some that were pronounced and carried out by the biblical prophets of old. For instance, in the Old Testament we read that Samuel says to Saul: "Now go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." (I Samuel 15:3).

However, we read horrified exclamations of "cruelty", "trickery", "atrocious crime" on the part of several Orientalists who completely overlook the heinous treachery shown by the Bani-Quraidhah. Coming after the two preceding instances of rebellion and breach of trust — towards which Muḥammad had shown clemency and moderation — this treason justifiably earned the harsh biblical sentence pronounced by Sa'd-ibn-Mu'ādh.

THE JEWS AT KHAIBAR

In this village had gathered certain Jewish clans including the Bani-Qainoqā' and the Bani-n-Naḍīr after their exodus from Medina. "The Jews of Khaibar, especially the leaders of the Bani-n-Naḍir, were still incensed at Muḥammad. They made lavish use of their wealth to induce the neighbouring Arabs to take up arms against the Muslims."[42]

Among the clans in Khaibar was Sallām-ben-abil-Ḥoqaiq and his tribe. He felt "wild and bitter against the Muslims. Detesting Muḥammad and the Muslims, he made use of every endeavour to excite the neighbouring tribes including the Sulaims and the Ghaṭafans, against them. It was impossible for the Muslim community to tolerate this open treachery on the part of those to whom every consideration had been shown with the object of securing their neutrality, if not their support. The very existence of the Muslim community was at stake, and every principle of safety required that these traitorous designs should be quietly frustrated."[43]

In the end the Jews of Khaibar made themselves so intolerable that the Prophet and his army laid siege to their village until most of the defenders surrendered, although a few of them fought on till death. By the terms of surrender those who wished to stay on were made to pay an annual tax to the Prophet. Others preferred to leave Khaibar and the Arabian peninsula. This was not honestly reported by Menezes who claimed that the Prophet made a raid against them to confiscate their wealth.[44]

The continuing presence of at least a few Jews in Medina is an argument against the view sometimes put forward by European writers that Muḥammad adopted a policy of clearing them out of Medina just because they were Jews.[45]

The Qur'ānic attitude towards idolators and others

Muslims are enjoined to treat the polytheists and the atheists, such as Communists, as basically different human beings. For to believe in many gods or to believe in no God are unforgivable sins; while polytheism is totally rejected by the Qur'ān, not to believe in Allāh is viewed as incomprehensible ingratitude on behalf of man for his creator. This explains why Communist countries like Russia with her commitment to a policy of imposing "scientific" atheism on her own and other societies has not been recognized by an Islamic state such as Saudi Arabia. No doubt Lenin's remark, "every religious idea, every idea of any divinity, even every flirtation with a divinity is the most inexpressible vileness" would also be influential in this decision.[46]

How Islam was introduced to other peoples

Writers of the Middle Ages were reported by Daniel to have vehemently accused Muḥammad of imposing Islam with "violence and

force" on others.[47] The same wild accusation was echoed early in this century by Wollaston and Menezes, and much more recently by de Gramonts.[48] For instance, Wollaston alleged: "The Qur'ān or the sword is an alternative which meets the eye on every page of the history of Islam."[49] While Menezes reiterated: "The religion of Islam owed its progress and establishment entirely to the sword."[50]

Such a sweeping conjecture was not believed even in the eighteenth century by Sale who indicated that, "they are greatly deceived who imagine it to have propagated by the sword alone."[51] Better informed scholars such as Lane in the last century, H.G. Wells, Gairdner, and Baljon in this century have disproved it in their writings.[52] Even Rodinson very recently vindicated the Muslim rulers when he wrote that they "did not, as it has been believed in Europe, impose conversion by force. On the contrary, they strongly disproved of it."[53]

Among the well-known historical facts is that the Prophet started preaching Islam in Mecca peacefully on his own in the face of extremely violent hostility and persecution inflicted by the Meccan leaders on him and his small but growing community of believers. Later in Medina, and until the end of his life, he followed peaceful means of persuasion. The way he invited the chiefs of tribes, the rulers and princes of neighbouring territories was recorded in Islamic history.[54] He sent messages with special envoys to the Emperors of Persia and Byzantium, to the Governor of Egypt and to several Arab princes, including the rulers of Ghassān, Yemen and Baḥrain. Some of the envoys were received with great respect, hospitality and courtesy. A few, however, were confronted with extremely hostile behaviour. The Persian Emperor, Khosru Parvis received the Prophet's letter with disdain, flew into a passion, and abruptly sent away the messenger.[55] The Arabs of Ghassān murdered the Prophet's envoy. Deeply angered, Muḥammad dispatched an army of 3,000 to their town of Mo'tah.

The Muslims were obliged to take up arms in their own defence and for the security of their embryonic state several times while the Prophet was in Medina. This is an altogether different matter from making Islam known to others. The way Islam should be introduced to others is indicated by the Qur'ānic verse rendered:

> Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way. Lo! thy Lord is

> Best Aware of him who strayeth from His way and He is Best Aware of those who go aright. (16:125)

Muslims are instructed to be extra courteous in their discussions with the people of the Book:

> And argue not with the people of the Book unless it be in (a way) that is better, save with such of them as do wrong; and say: We believe in that which has been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our God and your God is One, and unto Him we surrender. (29:46)

Once the message was made known to others, the messenger was considered to have completely fulfilled his obligation. The Prophet was addressed by God regarding those who had rejected the message:

> Remind them, for thou art but a reminder,
> Thou art not at all a warder over them. (88:21–22)

> But if they are averse, We have not sent thee as a warder over them. Thine is only to convey (the message). (42:48)

Forcible conversion is not only futile but is also absolutely forbidden in accordance with the precepts of the Qur'ān (10:99):

> There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. And he who rejects false deities and believes in Allāh has grasped a firm handhold which will never break. (2:256)

As Baljon has rightly indicated: "It is a sad misunderstanding to suppose a spirit of intolerance to prevail in the Qur'ān"; the contrary is true as proven by the Book itself.[56]

The very existence of so many flourishing Christian communities in countries that have been for centuries under Muslim rule is an abiding testimony to the toleration they have enjoyed, sometimes even better than the treatment of their co-religionists. Unarmed for the most part and utterly defenceless, it would have been easy for a powerful and harsh Muslim sultan like Salim I (1514), or Ibrahim (1646), to have utterly rooted out his Christian subjects or to have banished them from his dominions as the Spaniards did to the Moors or the English to the Jews.[57] This, in fact, never happened. Indeed, small non-Muslim communities have usually been better off in most ways under the *pax Islamica* state than

otherwise.[58] As an example, when the Jews, towards the end of the fifteenth century suffered their exodus from Spain in the wake of the defeat of the Moors, the only refuge they could find was a blessed corner of the Ottoman Empire, and that was Palestine.

The Christian Church of North Africa received several shattering blows from the Vandal persecution during most of the fifth century after which it never recovered. The Arian Vandals persecuted the Orthodox with relentless fury, flung their bishops into exile, forbade the public exercise of their religion and cruelly tortured whoever refused to conform to their own creed.[59] The fates of the Syrian Orthodox and the Egyptian Copts were no better under Byzantine rule. No wonder they welcomed the Muslim rulers with their justice and security which rescued them from the Byzantine yoke.[60] An incident remembered in Islamic history relates to a young Coptic boy who was playing with the Muslim Amir's son who for one reason or the other struck him repeatedly. The boy's father was infuriated, but instead of complaining to the Amir, travelled with his son all the way to Medina and asked to meet the Caliph 'Omar-ibnel-Khaṭṭab.[61] 'Omar received him, treated him and his son as guests and summoned his Amir from Egypt. After a session of tribunal 'Omar instructed the young Coptic boy to take full revenge from the Amir's son.

In order to visualize how Islam spread in those early centuries, among so many peoples with diverse backgrounds in Africa, Asia and Europe, we should try to imagine the nature and circumstances of those times. The media of mass communication we now take for granted did not exist then. There was no press, no radio, no television, nor even a reliable mail service. There was no security or freedom of expression. The way Islam spread into East and Central Africa, India and Indonesia is well worth looking into. History tells us that the Arabs, particularly those of Mecca, used to live mainly on their trade. There were generations of shrewd and experienced merchants since before Islam. They had their regular caravans to Yemen every winter and to Syria every summer. They, no doubt, knew India and the African countries across the Red Sea. With the means of transport and communication being what they were in those days — no telex messages, no quick and easy transfers of credits through banks — the leading merchants had to have relatives or liaison officers permanently resident in each of those business centres across the seas. Some Arab traders from Yemen, Hadramawt and Nejd became established in the

main ports such as Djibouti, Dar es-Salam, Maqdishu on the African coast, and in Java in what is now Indonesia. They naturally lived in close contact with the natives, adopted their language and intermarried with them.[61] With their honourable Islamic conduct in their business deals and in their everyday life, they earned the admiration of the local inhabitants and usually of their tribal chiefs as well.

The distinguished families which resulted from the intermarriages between the Muslim Arab merchants and the local dignitaries were considered as holy. Among them are found the names of the Mahdis and the Mirghanis who have been famous in the Sudan for centuries and even up to the present day. Among the Sumali names worthy of mention are Sheikh 'Ali-Derjeba and Sheikh Muḥammad-ben-Julīd.[62] These holy families used to build mosques, schools and took great interest in spreading the new faith among their fellow natives. Thus, in due time those trading centres became nuclei from which Islam peacefully diffused into East and Central Africa. We read about the Islamic kingdoms such as Sidāma and Ifāt, and the empires of Mali (1238–1488) and Ghana.[63]

Along similar lines, Islam was introduced into Java and the East Indies; that took place "in the main peaceably by preaching or under the influence of its social prestige."[64] The first Arab "missionary" to go to Java after the earliest Indian Muslims was a certain Mawlana Malik Ibrahīm who died in 1419. "Like the traders who followed him, he was an inhabitant of Hadramawt in Southern Arabia and it is they who, by their inofficial and individual activities, were mainly responsible for the spread of Islam in the island and in Indonesia."[65]

The way Islam entered Eastern Europe is another, but not much different, story. In the eleventh century, a Muslim jurisconsult was taken prisoner probably in one of the wars between the Byzantine Empire and one of its Muslim neighbouring states. He was brought to the country of Pechenegs, between the lower Danube and the Don. The way of Islamic life he set before the people around him impressed them and eventually induced them to embrace the faith. Also the Bashkires of Hungary accepted the faith towards the end of the tenth century from seven Muslims who came there from Bulgaria.[66]

Sir Thomas Arnold ascribed such results to the rationalism of the faith. He quoted Professor Montet who indicated that, "Islam

is a religion that is essentially rationalistic in the widest sense of the term, its simplicity and clearness of its teachings are certainly among the most obvious forces at work. A creed so precise, so stripped of all theological complexities and consequently so accessible to the ordinary understanding might be expected to possess and does indeed possess a marvellous power into the conscience of men."[67]

Had Islam been imposed by force, or had the converts accepted it under the threat of the sword they would never have been sincere to it, nor would they have brought up their children in it.[68] As a matter of fact their descendants in the course of time composed the main part of the Muslim nation. Among these were eminent scholars of the faith whose illustrious names shine in Islamic history. Al-Bokhāry who was born in Bokhara in southern Russia; al-Rāzi, a Persian born in Rayy near Teheran in 865; the Turkish savant Al-Fārābi who died in 950; al-Cordovy, the exeget and Averroes the scientist philosopher were both of Andalusia, Spain; Ṭāreq whose name is still borne by Gibraltar (Gibel Tāreq) was a Berber warrior, to name just a few.[69]

Thus, Islam was not imposed upon people by the sword. History records that events to the contrary did in fact take place. In 1910 the missionary John Larson recorded that as soon as religious liberty was granted to the people of the Caucasus in the Russian Empire in 1905, those Muslims who had been converted by force to the Christian church all returned to Islam.[70]

We also read of the Mongols in the thirteenth century when their armies swept unabated across Asia, sacked the cities of Bokhara, Samarkand, Balkh and Baghdad, turning most of them into ruins, and conquered the main part of the Islamic Empire.[71] The conquerers were impressed by the Islamic faith of their subjects and embraced it themselves. One of the Muslim prisoners of war whom they had enslaved eventually converted thousands by his exemplary conduct and by his sincere preaching. Later, some Islamic Mongol Empires appeared in India.[72]

In order to realize further how devoid of compulsion was the worldwide spread of Islam let us think of the international situation during the last five centuries or so. During that period, the Muslim countries have been mainly on the defensive, and even at times partly occupied by foreign powers. Nevertheless, Islam still spread east and west until today there are millions of Muslims in North America and Europe. No one could believe that all these

new Muslims accepted the faith under the threat of the sword, as a result of organized missionary work or even induced by the example set by born Muslims.

The question may be asked: If that is the case with the spread of Islam, then what about the wars we read about in history books? In order to answer this question, one should think of society since the dawn of history. Is it not a fact that humanity has more often than not been suffering from local, civil and global wars? How long have people anywhere lived without suffering or being under the threat of war? It is as if war between nations, conflicts between groups and among individuals are sadly an essential part of their lives — a necessity for their existence. Muslims are no exception. Although Islam is the religion of peace — its greeting word is "peace", and one of its main aims is to establish peace on earth equitably, yet some pages of Islamic history are stained with wars, strife and conflicts, sometimes between Muslim groups. In modern history, we hear and read about the wars between Egypt and Yemen, the troubles between the Kurds and the Shi'ite groups in Iraq and in Iran.

The Qur'ān does not overlook these facts of life. Nor does it ask the Muslims to turn a blind eye or succumb to pacifism when under oppression. If they are attacked they should fight back until equitable peace can be restored. The Qur'ān most emphatically condemns aggression under all conditions:

> Fight in the cause of Allāh those who fight you, but do not transgress (limits), for Allāh loves not the transgressors. (2:190)

Being fully realistic, the Qur'ān commands Muslims not to succumb to oppression, but at the same time to be pious and seek God's help and keep to the right cause:

> If then any one transgresses the prohibition against you, transgress likewise against him; but fear Allāh, and know that Allāh is with the pious. (2:194)

The Qur'ān does not say that Allāh is with you (Muslims), it states that Allāh is "with the pious", so strict piety must be observed even under such arduous conditions of conflict. Muslims are enjoined to apply equity even on the battlefield and towards their enemies. The conduct of Saladdin and the much earlier Muslim knights is recorded in history.

And if they incline to peace incline thou also to peace and trust in Allāh. Lo! He is the Hearer, the Knower. (8:61)

The Qur'ān thus sanctions, such practice as retaliation under legal regulations and safeguards but seldom fails to add, with the same breath, instructions to temper the rigour of justice with the mercy and charity that come from the realization of one's great need of Allāh's help and forgiveness.[73]

If the driving stimulus for the Islamic armies in the early centuries was not to impose the faith on other peoples, what was it? Admitting the fact that no one felt under constraint to accept Islam, Rodinson very recently came up with the new idea that the armies proceeded from the Arabian peninsula in a hunt for loot and mundane power. "Arabia had too many men and too little cultivable land to feed its population," he surmised.[74] A conjecture put forward in such haste cannot justify any serious scientific conclusion. Objective research should be undertaken in order to find out how much the "invading" Muslims made for themselves and how much they distributed among the people under their rule in Egypt, Syria, North Africa or Spain, how much did they send back to their central administration in Medina or Damascus? How many new cities were built in the occupied territories: how much was spent on fine architectural arts, say in Cordova, Granada, Cairo, Baghdad or Agra, and how many such cities were erected in Arabia? How large were the public funds of each of the occupied territories before and after the Muslim "invasion"? Another question which still needs to be correctly answered is: how many among the Muslim armies were Arab "adventurers", and how many were Turks, Berbers, Egyptians and Persians. The information sought by these questions undoubtedly needs intensive research, but it could prove whether the Muslim armies were out for loot or otherwise. We should all be open-minded about it. But the fact remains, and seems to be generally acknowledged by scholars, that the spread of Islam in the East and West has been rooted in logical persuasion and sincere conviction.

Chapter 12

The Qur'ānic Code of Morals

As the message from Allāh, the Creator and source of all goodness, virtue and grace, to man his vicegerent on earth, the Qur'ān embodies a wealth of divine advice and guidelines to show man what is right and what is wrong. The Qur'ānic code of morality is transcendent and ideal, its scope is comprehensive and far-reaching. In detail it is meticulous and decisive and its scale is sensitive and fair. Although there is some dependence upon the historical and geographical circumstances of society, their sound bases and transcendent goals are the same.

Transcendent versus relative morality

The Qur'ānic norms of conduct for the individual and for society are distinctly different from those laid down and frequently changed by man as a result of social speculations and experimental investigations. They are unlike relative morality which sees neither harm nor shame in shifting the borderline between right and wrong, depending upon the whims of society or rather of the small but powerful groups in charge of the public media. Looking

at Europe over the last few centuries, we notice how things dismissed at times as vulgar, obscene and immoral became the vogue at others. This can easily be recognized without going into further detail. But does this mean that technical and scientific development coupled with continuous change in our environment automatically stipulates a simultaneous "modernization" of morality? Surely not. For to steal someone else's property was, is and always should be condemned whether it be a camel or a cadillac, a hen or a helicopter, a shekel or a shilling, a country or a candlestick.

Man's progress in the course of thousands of generations has multiplied his knowledge and enabled him to plumb ever deeper the depths of oceans and outer space. He can now even manipulate atoms and develop new materials. Both the facilities and the demands of civilization have outgrown his every expectation. Yet his basic physical needs have always remained the same. He still cannot survive without air, water and the basic nutritious ingredients for his body, nor without sleep. Why then should the basic needs of his mind and spirit be overlooked, neglected or denied? Why should his body be stuffed and overfed while his soul becomes starved, suffocated or poisoned by an unrelieved diet of materialism?

Mutilating traditional moral values just for the sake of "inevitable change" and keeping pace with progress can hardly be right or acceptable to the rational mind, clear conscience or innate good taste. Most usually this compulsion to change morality is a fallacy based on rhetorical questions. Sometimes it is all too easy to advocate an end to personal responsibility for the well-being of others in favour of personal gain alone. In order that the structure of civilized society survives, some standard of moral values must be observed. Of these, as we have seen, transcendent morality can never be rendered obsolete although it may be seen as such by some. In fact, morality should not be described as relative or subjective. It is interactive, dynamic and vitally effective in the far-reaching and orderly development of society.

The Qur'ānic code of morality illustrates. Allāh's wisdom, mercy and love for man. He has assigned to man's service everything in the heavens and in the earth (14:32–33). Allāh does not forbid man to enjoy the good things of life within moderation, practicality and balance. (7:31,33) All things are permissible in principle except what is singled out as obligatory which must be

observed, and what is prohibited, which must be avoided. Both orders stem from Allāh's interest and care for man, the whole man, his spiritual and physical well-being. The discipline imposed by the observance of both commitments and prohibitions is designed to build in the individual a sound mind, a soul at peace with itself, a strong personality and a healthy body. In the broader context it establishes welfare, prosperity and happiness in society.

No tonic for invigorating the conscience could be more effective than the Qur'ānic teachings and the belief in the Hereafter. Conviction that the Day of Judgement will take place is the final relieving answer to many complicated problems of this world. If some people imagine they are shrewd enough to be able to get away with wrongdoing just as they sometimes escape the penalty of the worldly laws, fool public opinion or happen to evade being condemned by relative morality, they are wrong. Finally, on the Day of Judgement everything will be exposed, all their deeds will be revealed by Allāh for His judgement. Neither lawyer nor counsel will stand on such people's behalf. To the same degree of accuracy, charity will be rewarded in this world as well as in the next.

> On the day when every soul will find present whatever it has done of good
> And that which it has done of evil, it will wish that between it and that (evil) there were a long distance.
> And Allāh cautions you against His retribution.
> And Allāh is Compassionate to the servants. (3:29)

The vitality of the Muslim's conscience is maintained by the everflowing spiritual spring, the five daily prayers. Their timing for a few minutes each and covering a span which extends from dawn until after sunset establishes an effective connection between the believer's soul and God, the generous source of guidance and comfort (29:45; 2:45, 153, 238, 277).

> Surely the prayers keep one away from indecency and evil and certainly the remembrance of Allāh is the greatest (force) and Allāh knows what you do. (29:45)

> Allāh imposes not on any soul a duty beyond its scope. For it is that which it earns (of good) and against it is that which it works (of evil).
> Our Lord, punish us not if we forget or make a mistake. (2:286)

The act, the overseer and the judge

In order to compare the codes of relative and transcendent moralities it may help to illustrate the point if the comparison is made to include the civil code. Under the state legislative system we most often note crimes punished with varying degrees of severity. We seldom note much reference to the rewards of good works or charitable achievements, and then these may only be mentioned in passing. For alas! good news is not always considered news at all.

The code of relative morality and ethics does cover both right and wrong. Acts of goodness are commended by society, saluted in its news media and honoured in its festivities. In contrast, wrongdoing is denounced, despised and even banished. But here, as distinct from in the civil code, an act is judged by public opinion. In both instances what is done or said in private is generally outside the scope of judgement and is of concern to neither the law courts nor society. What is said or done in public can be either hailed or condemned depending on the whim of the community. The standards of judgement may very well change down the centuries as we learn from history. For instance, the number of good, strong slaves owned used to be a matter of pride to the self-respecting Roman citizen of means. Today, drinking and smoking are disapproved of in some Muslim and Christian communities but not in others, to mention a few examples of habits.

The transcendent moral code, as exemplified by the Qur'ān, is much more firmly balanced and far reaching. With it the clear heart and the genuine conscience feel appeased and tranquil. The criteria do not change at all according to the taste of the individual or society. It allows and recommends all the good but shuns all the bad and harmful things. It invigorates the conscience of every man and woman and establishes it as his or her overseer and judge.

Not every individual can be a saint, and it is natural that gangs of wrongdoers appear in most communities. But in the ideal Islamic society these are vigilantly watched and kept at bay by the powerful public opinion of the faithful.

> And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and forbid the wrong. And these are they who are felicitous (4:103)

The scope of Qur'ānic morality is all-encompassing and integrative because it combines at once faith in Allāh, religious rites, spiritual observances, social conduct, intellectual pursuits, eating habits, manners of speech and all other aspects of human life.[2] There are typical verses which preach chastity (24:30–31), honesty (e.g. 2:282), peaceableness and friendliness (4:86), politeness (49:13), forgiveness (3:134), benevolence (4:36), courage (3:172), veracity (22:30), and patience (2:155).[3]

> Say: Whether you hide what is in your hearts or manifest it Allāh knows it; and He knows whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. And Allāh is Possessor of power over all things. (3:29)

The Qur'ān teaches the Muslim that Allāh, the All-knowing, All-seeing, judges every deed, speech and thought with absolute fairness:

> Surely Allāh wrongs not the weight of an atom; and if it is a good deed He multiplies it and gives from Himself a great reward. (4:40)

According to the Qur'ān it is neither demanded nor expected of anyone to do the impossible. The believer does his best for the love of God and in obedience to him. The Compassionate, the Merciful does not hold him responsible for mistakes made in ignorance nor for falling short of transcendent goals. If the believer tries to accomplish benevolent work but cannot for some reason beyond his control, Allāh will still generously reward him for the good intention and the effort. If the believer succumbs to temptation and is at the point of doing wrong but stops just in time, and repents, Allāh, the All-forgiving will still accept him.

> And whoever does evil or wrongs his soul then asks forgiveness of Allāh will find Allāh Forgiving, Merciful. (4:110)

> And whoever does good deeds, whether male or female, and he (or she) is a believer — these will enter the garden and they will not be dealt with a whit unjustly. (4:124)

Piety and righteousness are cultivated by careful study of the

sacred Book, thoughtful meditation on its advice and faithfully carrying out the Islamic rites, remembering Allāh often.

> It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteous is the one who believes in Allāh and the Last Day and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and sets slaves free and keeps up prayer and pays the poor rate, and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in time of conflict. These are they who are truthful and these are they who are pious. (2:177)

The depth of permeation of the revealed morality and righteousness provided by the Qur'ān in the conscience and mind of the faithful is surely incomparably deeper than any code of conduct resulting from limited speculation or random unguided experiment by certain societies. How much more sensitively man's work is evaluated, how much more vigilant yet fair his conscience is as the overseer, and how much more exalted and generous and just is the divine judgement than that of any society of undoubtedly finite knowledge and experience.

In the light of the few verses rendered above, it is hard to find any basis whatever for the grave accusations that have been hurled against the Qur'ān, such as that it is "void of ethics"[4] or even worse that "all known vices were insanely imagined as favoured and considered as virtues" by the holy Book.[5] Undoubtedly such accusations do not represent the general opinion held in Orientalists' circles, yet they have been proclaimed by a few well-known scholars. Is it not surprising that from the same circles we find sincere admiration expressed for the revealed ethics, the deep moral earnestness, the sensitive wisdom and the model for the basic concepts underlying civilized society shown in the Qur'ān?[6]

As a thinking being man should form his own judgement and not follow any viewpoint without questioning. To go through the entire Qur'ān, studying each verse, reflecting on the ethics treated and comparing them with those recommended by old and new societies would be far beyond the scope of this book, to say nothing of a single chapter. This in fact, covers the field of several sciences known as *fiqh, tafsīr* and *sharī'ah*, on which thousands of

books have been written and thousands of scholars have spent their lives, both within and outside the Muslim world. Nevertheless, a fairly sound conclusion can confidently be drawn by studying a few typical verses relevant to each representative topic concerned with ethics in society:

> Say: Come, I will recite what your Lord has forbidden to you. Associate nought with Him and do good to parents and kill not your children for (fear of) poverty — we provide for you and for them — and draw not nigh to indecencies, open or secret, and kill not the soul which Allāh has forbidden except in the course of justice. This He enjoins upon you that you may understand.
>
> And approach not the property of the orphan except in the best manner until he attains his maturity. And give full measure and weigh with equity — We impose not on any soul a duty except to the extent of its ability. And when you speak be just, though it be (against) a relative. And fulfil Allāh's covenant. This He enjoins on you that you may be mindful. (6:151–152)

The subject of moral, intellectual and physical health

The Qur'ānic verses shine like brilliant far-reaching beacons of righteousness to guide the pious through the deluge of life. In extreme contrast to the complete sexual freedom and laxity in vogue in certain societies, and as a countermeasure, the Qur'ān advises, even enjoins men to cast down their sight (from gazing at women with desire); women should be equally observant of this advice and not expose their beauties except to their husbands and close family such as parents and children (24:30–31). Both men and women should have higher ideals in mind but if low thoughts emerge then they should seek help from Allāh and remember him (7:200). Muslims are exhorted not to draw near crime nor immorality, realizing their ruinous effects on the moral and physical health of both the individual and society. (17:32; 6:151)

The Qur'ān attaches the greatest importance to the institution of marriage. The well-being of the community is seen largely to de-

pend on the preservation of family and personal honour, to which extra-marital sex poses a dangerous threat. The Qur'ānic penalties for those who deliberately indulge in such base crimes are a severe enough deterrent for whoever may have such temptations.

Mental health and the capacity for systematic logic are cultivated by several verses. We are repeatedly invited to ponder on God's signs in the universe around us (2:164; 3,189). Learning through the study of natural phenomena, of the history of nations, and through reading is very meritorious (96:1–5; 68:1)

> Say, are those who know and those who do not know alike? Only those of understanding mind. (39:9)

Even man's physical health, diet, cleanliness and clothing receive their due share of attention in the Qur'ānic teachings.

> O ye who believe, when you rise up for prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows and wipe your heads and (wash) your feet up to the ankles. (5:7)

Thus out of piety, the Muslim keeps his body, clothes, the places of prayer and residence clean, even when there is an acute shortage of water. It is a deed of devotion to Allāh for, "He loves those who purify themselves." (2:222)

How far from the spirit of the faith, how forgetful of their beliefs and how disobedient to the Qur'ānic teachings are those individuals and communities in Islamic countries who lead unclean lives among heaps of dust and rubbish, even despite an abundance of water being available. Seeing such examples prompted several writers like Menezes to imagine mistakenly Islam to favour "living in the most dirty and filthy environment".[7]

The Qur'ānic care for man is by no means limited to his external cleanliness. There are regulations for dietary habits, including the prohibition of harmful food, particularly certain kinds of meat, and the shunning of intoxicants. However, under the threat of starvation prohibitions are waived, the situation being judged by the clear faithful conscience.

> He has forbidden you only what dies of itself, and blood and the flesh of the swine, and that over which any other (name) than (that of) Allāh has been invoked. Then, whoever is driven by necessity, not desiring, nor exceeding the limit, no sin is upon him. Surely Allāh is Forgiving Merciful. (2:173)

Over and above the benefits to man's physical health ensured by Islamic dietary habits and fasting, as proven by modern medical references, their effectiveness in augmenting one's conscientiousness cannot be overestimated. When the faithful takes a meal or drink he thinks of God, thanks him for his provision and for the privilege of enjoying it and digesting it. The production of vegetables and fruits from soil and water is purely divine. Man prepares the field, he ploughs, sows and irrigates, but the actual process of growing the plant is exclusively divine. Despite the gigantic advances in science and technology man is still fully dependent on the earth for his food. He can make synthetic fibres and plastics which simulate cotton cloth and leather, but man cannot synthesize substances to replace vegetables or fruit, despite the soil and water at his disposal.

No less important is the Islamic food for the brain and intellect. Uprightness and constructive thoughts and speech are always favoured; corruption and vulgarity are condemned under all conditions:

> And the servants of the Benevolent are they who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them they say peace. (25:63)

The believers are enjoined to be pious and speak right objective words (4:9), and not to get involved in idle talk (28:55). As for those who like to spread obscenity and scandal among the believers, "for them is a grievous chastisement in this world and in the Hereafter" (24:19).

Earning and spending

Morality rates highly even in economic life, which is based on a solid foundation of divine instructions. To earn a living by honest labour is not only a duty but a great virtue, to be valued on equal standing with acts of worship and to complement the Muslim's belief. (23:51; 41:33)

The Muslim is enjoined to be self-supporting and to provide for his dependents. Nature is assigned to the service of man who is invited, encouraged and commanded to exploit the natural resources made available to him.

He it is Who made the earth subservient to you, so go about in the spacious sides thereof, and eat of His sustenance, and unto Him is the rising (after death).(67:15)

Whatever the individual man or woman makes or earns through lawful means is his or her private possession which neither the state, community nor any one else can justifiably claim (4:32). Unlike communism, Islam replaces the totalitarian artificial supremacy of the state by the benevolent supremacy of God; it bans the Communist theory of class warfare in favour of sound morals, brotherly co-operation and mutual responsibility between the individual and society, the well-off and the poor. On the other hand, Islam gives the utmost protection against capitalistic greed and ruthless exploitation of the workers.[8] It does not deify man or his property, nor does it idolize the proletariat and abolish free enterprise. Islam accepts man the way he is created, recognizing both his instinctive aspirations and his limited powers.

Islam demands honesty in all business deals, which should be concluded with frankness, justice and honour (83:1–6). It condemns cheating and forbids usury or taking interest in return for lending money to the needy (2:274). This ban is valid of course whether the debtor belongs to the same or a different faith. If he is too badly off to pay back his debts, then there should be a postponement until his situation improves. And "that you remit the debt as alms is better for you if you only knew" (2:280). This is in direct contrast to the traditional practice of some societies of old where the debtor and his family used to be threatened by enslavement[9] (Lev.35:44–45). It equally condemns imprisonment and expropriation as seen in some cases in modern times.

Included among the Qur'ānic injunctions is the exhortation that one should be faithful to one's trust and covenant, and upright in one's testimony, (70:31–32):

O ye who believe be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for Allāh even though it be against yourselves or your parents or close relatives. (4:125)

Although man is encouraged to strive for material betterment, yet proprietors are constantly reminded of the fact that they are mere agents appointed by Allāh to administer their holdings. Man comes into this world empty-handed and he departs from it likewise. The actual, real and permanent owner is God alone. To him

belongs whatever is in heaven and earth (2:284). Consequently, giving the poor or needy their rightful share of the wealth held by those better off is a divine command:

> To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and all affairs are referred back to Allāh.
> Believe in Allāh and His messenger and spend (in charity) out of (the substance) whereof He has appointed you heirs.
> For those of you who believe and spend, for them there is a great reward. (57:7–8)

When the estate is being divided among the heirs, their shares are related by specified ratios (4:11–13). If some needy person or orphan happens to be present, the heirs are advised to grant them a portion of what they have inherited and to say kind words to them (4:8).

Unlike other codes, the Qur'ān teaches believers to give in charity out of the substance with which Allāh has temporarily provided them, to give with pleasure, kindness and piety, not grudgingly nor out of conceit, without hypocrisy, nor employing any word or gesture that may hurt the recipient:

> Kind words and forgiveness are better than charity followed by injury. (2:263)

Besides charity and almsgiving, normal spending is within the range of Qur'ānic concern:

> Make not your hand tied (like a niggard's) to your neck nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach (like a spendthrift), lest you become rebuked and destitute. (17:28)

As explained in Chapter 10, charitable spending constitutes a fulfillment of one of the five pillars of Islam. This is incumbent not only upon those who have wealth, but, under certain conditions, upon everyone who earns. At the end of the month of fasting (Ramaḍān), the head of every family which has more than enough for the day should give at least a minimum amount to needy people. He gives on behalf of all his dependants — his wife, children, aged parents and even newborn babies. This is an active expression of gratitude to Allāh for the life and health of every individual. It also moulds society into a solid spiritual brotherhood.

Zakāh ("almsgiving") is not like a mere civil duty imposed by the state on capitalists according to man-made laws which may hit

or miss. Nor is it like the taxes or tithes which used to be levied by kings of old according to their individual judgement.[10] Unlike both, it is a religious privilege supervised by the faithful's conscience; Allāh is the judge, in this world and in the next.

The private property of every man or woman that is lawfully earned is held inviolable by the Qur'ān. Crimes of theft, robbery, highway banditry and bribery have their severe penalties, equally applicable no matter what the faith of the robber or robbed is, as distinct from older traditions (Deut. 24:7; 5:33,38). These transgressions are considered heinous sins against the religious rules, not merely crimes for which the civil-code penalty may be imposed, reduced or evaded.

Studies of the Qur'ānic laws by Muslim scholars have indicated that not every incident of theft is punishable by cutting off the thief's hand. To be considered as deserving such a severe punishment, he must first plead guilty, the stolen goods must have been properly locked up and of commercial value above a certain minimum. The judge must also be firmly convinced before pronouncing the verdict. This punishment is not applicable if the theft takes place between members of the same family; nor is it imposed on the needy who steal food to eat. Such needy people would have adequate social security and a minimum level of welfare independently of their faiths, when judged according to the Islamic law.[11]

Those in the West who show distress at the fate of the thief whose hand is severed, and describe the penalty as harsh or savage, show an unjustifiable preference for the well-being of the condemned individual over the welfare and security of the community as a whole. Without any doubt, people who have lived in a country like Saudi Arabia where the Islamic law is applied appreciate the complete relief from any threat to life, property or honour in the home, business or on the highway, or even in the middle of the desert; this is a feeling that prevails at all times of the day and night, and one which is in contrast to what occurs in many a city in the West.[12] In such an Islamic country the Qur'ānic penalty has rarely needed to be imposed. The mere knowledge that it is applicable has deterred most from touching the property of others.[13] An atmosphere of peace overwhelms the whole nation in Saudi Arabia without the need for multiple locks, sophisticated gadgetry or a huge police force.

How different is the scene in many major, capital cities in the West. There, many people feel unsafe, insecure, and some even

resort to barricading themselves inside their homes. They dare not admit any visitor into their homes without first checking and double-checking his or her identity. There, how many people live under the threat of robbery, mugging, rape, kidnapping, highjacking and even assassination?

Family life

Being the vitally important unit on which society is built, the family enjoys a distinguished status among the major social institutions of Islam. The family bond of blood ties and marital relationships entails mutual expectations of rights and obligations. These pertain to identity and maintenance, counsel and inheritance, affection and care for the young, and security for the aged.

The various aspects of family life, including marriage, divorce, the relationships between children and parents, the rights of widows and orphans, inheritance, adoption, and even the delicate point of breast feeding and its consequences are handled with appropriate depth in the Qur'ān. The relevant verses and Traditions of the Prophet provide copious and superb material on which the Islamic legal and ethical norms are based. Sufficient justice cannot be done to them by covering all these subjects and their various branches and viewpoints in only one chapter or section such as this; interested readers would be advised to refer to 'Abdel-'Āti's book on the family structure in Islam and its bibliography.[14] The subjects are naturally dealt with in multitudinous volumes in Arabic. However, it may suffice here to comment briefly on the Qur'ānic passages related to each of the salient topics.

MARRIAGE

As viewed by Islam, marriage is a religious duty, a moral safeguard and a social commitment solemnly made by the partners, a covenant with God and with one another to lead a righteous life of mutual fulfillment, self-realization, love and peace, compassion

and sincerity, comfort, serenity and hope. It is a challengin, m mitment to life, to society and to the dignified, meaningful and continued progress of humanity.

Marriage in Islam is neither a pure sacrament, nor a mere civil contract. It is above all a divine bond, a solemn agreement between man and woman, witnessed first and foremost by God. The contract is concluded in His Name, in obedience to Him, and according to His ordinances. The partners pledge to shoulder their responsibilities equally (2:228). Islam absolutely forbids types of so-called marriage, such as serial monogamy, open or group marriages, which go on in some civilized societies.[15]

The husband is commanded by Allāh to consort with his wife equitably and kindly; one of his specific responsibilities is her full maintenance, an obligation to be carried out cheerfully without reproach, injury or condescension.[16] With understanding, forgiveness, and in a tender loving manner, he should not only avoid hurting her, but should also bear with her if she does something disagreeable (4:19).

Before the marriage contract is drawn up the suitor should, in obedience to God, give his wife-to-be a dowry according to her standards, his means and as a gesture indicating that he wants and needs her, that he is willing and prepared to undertake his full responsibilities, assuring her security with him, and that he is not looking for any material gain from his matrimonial bond with her.

The main obligation of the wife as a partner in the marital relationship is to contribute to the success and happiness of the marriage as much as possible, to be righteous, faithful, loving and respectful. She should obey her husband in what is right. Her chief care should be to bring up the children with the best of manners and to make the home a pleasant, comfortable and happy environment. The role of the wife can best be illustrated by the Qur'ānic description of the pious who pray saying:

> Our Lord! Make our wives and offspring a joy for our eyes (and hearts) and guide us (all) as to be models of piety. (25:74)

The dowry and whatever the wife makes or earns are absolutely hers; the husband is entitled to no part of it either through amalgamation of assets or otherwise, in sharp contrast with some ancient traditions (Num. 30:17), and with some modern customs.[17]

PROHIBITED MARRIAGES

The Qur'ān has clearly and specifically indicated the blood relationships which prohibit marriage (4:23). The prohibition equally applies to some connections by marriage and includes the wet-nurse who, through her act of breast feeding the child, is treated like the mother. With equal emphasis an illogical prohibition which had prevailed in Arabia before Islam was annulled by the Qur'ān (33:37). People used to adopt children and give them every privilege enjoyed by their own sons. The wife of the adopted son used to be among the prohibited categories, for no factual or biological reason. In pre-Islamic Arabia, as well as in some other societies past and present, insurmountable barriers of race, caste, colour and social background have been traditionally put up against marriage. These have been emphatically condemned by the Qur'ān; the main criterion it recognizes is faith and righteousness. A believing maid is better for you than an idolatress lady even though the latter may appeal to you (2:221).

The adoption of children could produce phantom blood relations, abnormal connections and might prohibit marriages which are logically, biologically and religiously permissible. It would also interfere with the relationship between the child and his real parents and family, between him and his foster family, and between him and society at large. The Qur'ānic advice for evading these social problems is:

> Call them by (the name of) their fathers, this is more equitable with Allāh; but if you know not their fathers then they are your brethren in faith and your protegēs. (33:5)

PLURALITY OF WIVES

This is one of the main focal targets of Orientalists' criticism and one about which serious misconceptions have been spread in the West by multitudes of fantastic films and novels of the "Thousand-and-One Nights" type. There, the Muslim man is still widely pictured as one possessed by physical passion and himself in possession of a hareem comprising a large number of wives and concubines, with full liberty to shift from one wife or a number of wives to another.[18] Hence we hear the oft-repeated cry, past and present,

for the emancipation of women. This serious point deserves enlightened consideration by whoever is interested to learn the truth about how the Qur'ān and other books handle the subject.

First of all, what may be permitted by Islam is *polygyny* ("plurality of wives"), and most definitely not polygamy for which the correct connotation is "having multiple wives and husbands", nor is it polyandry. Equally emphatically Islam condemns homosexuality, and lesbianism; it dismisses both as aspects of extreme moral corruption. Unfortunately, some Western societies have severed their links with their Christian heritage, becoming engulfed by so-called moral progress and have either taken a passive attitude or even legalized such doomed moral decadence.[19]

Islam has a balanced, realistic and integrated view of man. He is not demanded, nor is he expected to be other than what he is with his natural aspirations, biological dispositions and instinctive desires, so long as these are properly disciplined. As such, when Islam permits polygyny it is in recognition of man's nature; a safe and sound solution for some acute social problems. These basic facts were overlooked by certain Christian and Jewish societies which arbitrarily imposed monogamy.

It is well known, although not so widely publicized, that polygyny has been adopted in several Christian and Jewish circles, both past and present, as instanced by the Mormon communities. Polygyny has been practised throughout human history, notably by biblical prophets such as Abraham, David and Solomon, to name but a few. It was also a matter of course for the emperors as well as the ordinary subjects in both the Roman and Byzantine Empires before and during the early Christian era. It was not until the sixth century that Justinian I decreed a law ordering his subjects to limit themselves to monogamy. However, only the elite then seemed to have abided by the ruling while for the masses it was a dead letter.[20] Likewise among the ancient Jews and Arabs plurality of wives was recognized as a custom.[21]

Even today, we are informed that polygynous Jewish immigrants have been causing the Israeli housing authorities a great deal of embarrassment.[22] Although it is not widely publicized, the views of some Afro-Asian bishops, who prefer polygyny to infidelity and mate swapping, are known to many.[23]

The monogamy instituted by some Christian societies was evidently a social rather than a religious injunction; there is no basis for it in the Gospels. Polygyny was a commonly accepted

way of life during the period of the biblical revelations; and this may account for the Bible not dealing with the subject. The Bible does not forbid it or restrict it, nor does it even impose regulations (John 8; Deut. 22).

When the Qur'ān was revealed, it did not ignore the practice or discard it, nor did it allow it to continue unchecked or unrestricted. The Qur'ān could not be indifferent to the question or tolerant of any chaos and irresponsibility associated with it. As it did with other prevailing customs, the Qur'ān stepped in to organize the institution, to eradicate its traditional evils while ensuring its benefits. Ever mindful of the needs of man and society, the bold though benevolent intervention of the Qur'ānic legislation produced definite norms for polygyny.[24] It became permissible only under specific circumstances and with certain qualifications. The Qur'ānic law was the first to tackle this point and set a maximum limit of four to the number of wives. This permission is still an exception to the ordinary rule, but it is prescribed as a solution for some social and moral problems.

The second or third wife, if ever taken, is entitled to exactly the same legal, social, financial and personal rights and privileges as the first wife. Equality between the wives in maintenance, treatment, even kindness and affection is a prerequisite demanded by Allāh for the permission of polygyny, and must be fulfilled by the husband. The occasional misconduct of some people is no fault of the norm:

> And if you fear that you shall not be able to deal equitably with the orphans marry women of your choice, two or three or four, but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal equitably (with them) then only one or what your right hands possess. (4:3)

This verse was revealed after the Battle of Uḥud in which many Muslims were killed leaving widows and orphans for whom due care was incumbent upon the Muslim survivors. Marriage was the best and normal way of looking after these widows and orphans. With this background, it is evident, as 'Abdel-'Āṭi aptly put it, that Islam did not invent polygamy, nor does it encourage polygyny as a common rule.[25] Nor did it demand its abolition knowing the impossibility of enforcing such a rule, as people would certainly have found ways around the prohibition. This is evident by the different names it takes in societies whose constitutions and relative ethics do not approve of polygyny.

Looking at circumstances today, polygyny presents the natural solution for certain social problems. In some nations, in the aftermath of devastating wars for instance, women outnumber men. What should unmarried women do? Where and how can they find the naturally desirable companionship, in the physical, moral, social, sentimental and emotional senses? If these natural desires and normal aspirations are not fulfilled within the legal and religious framework of marriage, what are the consequences? Very many have known and seen the moral chaos and irresponsible behaviour, with society either turning a blind eye or tailoring legal sanctions for what they see becoming the vogue. Who is the victim of this kind of relative ethics? Is it in the interest of society to suppress the legitimate desires and natural longings of men and women for companionship, the suppression of which by and large cannot be effective in reality and which would only drive them to illicit outlets. Whether it be from the social, moral, humanitarian or spiritual point of view, it is certainly far better to permit partnerships on a legal basis and in an honourable responsible manner, than to impose a ban against nature and then ignore the drastic moral repercussions.

Quite a number of writers from East and West, indoctrinated by such relative, fashionable morality — or immorality — have expressed their revulsion for the Islamic traditions of polygyny in particular and the status of women in general.[25] These have been capably refuted by several scholarly Western women who have carefully studied them in detail, then embraced Islam.[26,27]

DIVORCE, WHEN AND HOW?

No other topic seems to have been more of a target for ruthless attacks and harsh criticism from Orientalists past and present. It has been condemned as the worst symptom of degradation of women in Islam.[28] It may be quite valid for some individual cases in a few communities bearing the name "Muslim", but, is this Islam? How far in line with, or rather alien to, the Qur'ānic teachings is this ill-treatment of wives? Not one of those Orientalists seems to have cared to ask the question or look for a scientific or objective answer.

The Qur'ān never sanctions total freedom for divorce, nor does it blindly or theoretically ban it. Islam is realistic, and thus pre-

scribes divorce as the ultimate medicine for special cases of marriage which defy remedy, where no other solution is humanely possible. Although divorce is allowed, the Prophet is quoted by Mo'ādh-ibn-Jabal to have indicated that among lawful deeds the most hated by Allāh is divorce.[29]

Marriage, as said earlier, is a solemn contract for the husband and wife to live in a continuous happy, peaceful companionship and to fulfill its noble purposes. But, as is well known, despite all precautions taken by the husband and wife as well as everyone else concerned to realize that noble goal, human behaviour can be changeable and sometimes even unpredictable. The Qur'ān allows for this, and at the same time does not recognize any kind of nominal, stationary and ineffective marriage, such as separation. There are much better prescriptions for curing the troubled situations which develop between the partners which, more often than not, start from a point of misunderstanding. The two parties should try to settle their dispute and solve their problem between each other; each should be pious and show generosity to the other (4:128). If they cannot reach a reconciliation, let each appoint a counsellor from his and her relatives who should help them to sort out their differences:

> And if you fear a breach between the two, appoint an arbiter from his people and an arbiter from her people. If they both desire agreement Allāh will effect harmony between them. Surely Allāh is ever Knowing Aware. (4:35)

The husband and wife are enjoined always to be kind to each other. If he hates some things in his wife, he is reminded that there may be many more good things about her. (4:19) No doubt this advice goes for both parties.

If this attempt at reconciliation also fails to keep them together, divorce may be resorted to in its prescribed three successive stages. During a month when no marital relations have taken place, the husband or wife, whoever has the right, can solemnly express the wish to seek divorce. During a subsequent waiting period of three to nine months the would-be divorcee remains completely supported and maintained by her ex-husband (2:228–240). Even under these arduous circumstances both parties are reminded to show consideration to each other, and to be pious, realizing that Allāh is All-Knowing (65:1).

During the waiting period, the would-be divorcee cannot marry

another man. Both she and her ex-husband have time to think the matter over. They may even come to appreciate each other's good points, creating a favourable chance for reconciliation.

After the expiration of this waiting period reunion between husband and wife would be like a fresh marriage with regard to its formalities. Then, if their relationship does not improve, they can resort to divorce a second time. But if their second reunion proves to be a failure again, then a final divorce may be administered:

> Divorce may be twice, then keep them in good fellowship or let them go with kindness. (2:229)

Before, during and after the proceedings of divorce, piety, righteousness, consideration and human dignity stand in the forefront. Each party is always reminded to keep these ideals. Some other Traditions, in contrast, have given the husband an unchecked authority for the divorce and discharge of the wife who would have no rights. (Deut. 21:14; 24:1)

As 'Abdel-'Āṭi aptly indicated, it is not necessary for a Muslim to separate from his or her partner for several years before a divorce can be granted. Nor is the legal sanction of divorce conditional on adultery. Divorce and separation as endorsed by certain systems can very often involve immoral actions which Islam can never accept because it would violate the whole code of ethics which it cherishes.[30]

THE STATUS OF WOMEN

This is yet another subject on which ruthless accusations are made by Orientalists against the Qur'ānic teachings. For instance, Wollaston and others imagined that the Qur'ān did not admit women to Paradise, deprived them from participating in prayers, sanctioned their degradation, not to mention other revolting treatment.[31]

Admittedly, as with Nature, Islam does not hold man and woman as identical. Islam and the law of creation regard man and woman as equal, complementary to each other, but not identical. This difference between equality and sameness is of paramount importance for appreciating human nature and society. Bearing this fact in mind, there is no room for imagining women in Islam to be inferior to men, simply because their obligations and rights

are not identical. The fact that Islam gives woman equal, though not identical, rights illustrates that it acknowledges her independent personality and different biological makeup.

As 'Abdel-'Aṭi has duly shown, Islam neither branded women as the product of the devil nor considered them the seed of evil.[32] Never in the history of Islam has any Muslim writer doubted the human status of woman, her having a soul or possessing fine spiritual qualities. Nor do Muslim men pray in gratitude to God particularly for His not creating them women, as distinct from followers of older Traditions. Nor have Muslim women been commanded to keep silence and to be under obedience (I Cor. 14:34). According to pre-Islamic Traditions, woman was a contemptible creature, untouchable even by her own family when in her menses period. In the case of her husband dying she used to be either inherited by his relatives or, in some societies, burnt alive on his funeral pyre.[33]

The status of woman as established by Islam is unique. In some respects it is superior to customs in certain Western nations and Communist countries. In both societies, the woman has to toil in order to live. Sometimes she does the same job as the man for much less pay. Consequently, to win the right to acquire knowledge and the freedom to work, she has to make prohibitive sacrifices and give up many of her other natural rights. Whether all women are pleased with these "liberation" movements, and whether they are happy and satisfied with the results is a different matter. But the fact remains that the rights a modern woman enjoys fall short of those established for her Muslim counterpart by divine decree.

In Islam, she has her independent financial identity, whether she be wife, mother, sister, daughter or other relative (4:32). She is fully entitled to inherit, to earn, and to handle her own business transactions without any restrictions or sponsorship from husband or father. She is not barred from inheritance by any number of brothers (4:7; Deut. 21:15–17). Islam does not recognize the change in a woman's name by marriage; her maiden name remains an integral part of her social, economical and business personalities. Contrary to certain Orientalists' accusations, these privileges are more advanced than some which women are applying for in some civilized societies today.[34]

The Muslim woman is always associated with the traditional veil. She should beautify herself with honour and dignity, chasti-

ty, purity and integrity. By refraining from all deeds and gestures that might stir the passions and invite the gaze of strange men, she is protecting her character and morality. (24:30–31)

Muslim men and women are both urged to strive in search of knowledge. As related by 'Anas-ibn-Mālik, the Prophet declared that the search for knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim male and female.[35] This declaration was enthusiastically implemented by the Muslims in the periods when they used to live according to their faith; we read how the names of women featured among eminent scholars, poets and sufis, such as Zainab, Sakīnah and Rābi'ah. As much as man, woman is entitled to freedom of expression and to put forward her opinions on public, legislative and religious matters. History relays how a woman's opinion has influenced a code that was established by the Caliph 'Omar-ibnel-Khaṭṭāb. Even the arguments of women with the Prophet himself are recorded in the Qur'ān. (58:1–4; 60:10–12)

Not surprisingly, woman is recognized by Islam as a full and equal partner to man in the procreation of humankind. (4:1) She is equal to man in bearing personal and common responsibilities and in receiving rewards for her deeds. A typical verse related to this matter is rendered:

> And their Lord has accepted and answered them (saying) Never will I cause to be lost the work of any of you be he male or female, you are members one of another. (3:195)

The mistaken interpretation of two verses (2:228; 4:34) has caused some Orientalists to imagine a supremacy of man over woman. One of these verses is interpreted:

> And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them according to what is equitable, but men have a degree of advantage over them, and Allāh is mighty Wise. (2:228)

This declaration should be studied in its proper context. In 2:227–234 several aspects of the husband-wife relationship are discussed with particular reference to the subject of divorce. Hence the verse under study here indicates that women have full rights, the same as men. It adds that the husband has a degree of advantage which is only fair, remembering that the maintenance and full support of the household under all conditions are solely incumbent upon him. In return for all his extra responsibilities, he should have more say than his wife, not forgetting that he is gener-

ally more capable of taking an objective view of things, making more rational decisions and is less likely to be influenced by sentimental emotions, and that piety and consideration are the main theme for the husband-wife relationship.

A few Western women thinkers have greatly admired Islamic womanhood while condemning the manners of some Western "bachelor girls... trousered monstrosities with strident voices, females who ape men and boast that they can do a man's work, women who are neither mothers, wives nor lovers but unsexed misfits".[36]

PARENT—CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Parents and children are bound together by mutual commitments; each is asked to be mindful of God and to fulfill his obligations, out of love and obedience to Him. Children are both a divine gift and a test; they may constitute sources of pride and joy, seeds of vanity, a temptation to overindulge and a cause of distress to the parents (18:46). Guidelines are set for the parents to be neither over-protective nor negligent of their children.

The Qur'ān condemned and prohibited the inhuman and cruel ancient custom of killing unwanted children, which existed in Arabia[37], as well as among the poor masses in the Antonine period of the Roman Empire.[38] Among the most inviolable privileges of children is their right to life as well as to legitimacy. Parents are ordered by the Qur'ān to cherish and develop their children's physical and spiritual well-being (20:123; 66:6). The parents' responsibility and decisive role in moulding the child's personality is duly emphasized. Whether the parents are alive or deceased, present or absent, capable or without means, known or unknown, it is the joint responsibility of the Muslim community to look after the child's welfare in every sense of the word (4:2; 93:10).

A greater emphasis is laid on the care and consideration which children must show to their parents under all conditions. Next only to serving Allāh comes thankfulness to the parents (31:14):

> And thy Lord has decreed that you serve no one but Him and do good (*iḥsān*) to parents. If either or both reach old age with thee say not Fie to them nor chide them and speak to them generous words. (17:23)

The wholesome concept of *iḥsān* covers what is right, good, gentle and beautiful. It demands from the children active empathy, patience, gratitude, compassion and respect for their parents, providing them with the sincere counsel, support and maintenance they need, and every help to make their lives as comfortable as possible. It also includes prayers for their souls and honouring their legitimate commitments after their death. The Qur'ān expresses it in touching words:

> And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say: My Lord have mercy on them as they brought me up (when I was) little.
> Your Lord knows best what is in your hearts; if you are righteous He is surely Forgiving to those who turn (to Him). (17:24)

This behavioural theme required from the children is unconditional. It does not depend on whether they approve of their parents' ideas or deeds. It should prevail even despite any great difference of belief or opinion, or "generation gap" (6:74; 19:42–48).

The Qur'ānic attitude towards slavery

Although the slave trade has been internationally outlawed since the eighteenth century, some disguised substitutes have been discovered to have existed up to as late as 1972 in some countries. Hundreds of Africans were discovered being shipped in sealed trucks through Italy to other European countries where they would be put to heavy work on construction sites without any health, job or social security; once there they would subsist in almost concentration camp conditions.[39] Oddly enough, many criticisms have been hurled against Islam in this matter and hence the reason for these paragraphs.[40]

History records that slavery has been coeval with the existence of human society, and was fully established in ancient Rome and Greece as well as elsewhere long before Islam and Christianity. Aristotle described it as necessary, natural and even beneficial when properly applied.[41] Gibbon and Blair estimated the proportion of slaves to free citizens in Rome to have been about three to

one in the three centuries around Christ's birth. The sources of slaves used to be the results of capture in wars, piracy, kidnapping, sale of children by their own parents, and punishment for certain types of crimes. According to some old Jewish traditions, thieves and insolvent debtors used to be enslaved, some even with their wives and children (Exod. 21–23). Ancient Greeks were not allowed by law to take co-citizens as slaves, while among the Hebrews temporary enslavement was permitted. However, enslaving other "inferior" races was sanctioned and even recommended (Lev. 44).

The Church was not happy with slavery but its attitude was almost entirely passive. To many a white Christian his black co-religionist may very well have been his equal in the kingdom of Heaven but certainly not in the kingdom of this world.[42] The absolute power, to the extent of life and death, possessed by the master over his serfs and families of slaves exhibited a revolting picture of moral depravity and degradation.

Yet it is not slavery that the Qur'ān mentions but the emancipation of slaves and this it does in several contexts; not as a mere social or humanitarian gesture but first and foremost as an act of devotion to Allāh, the Beneficient, the Merciful. Among the charitable deeds of highest merit is "to free a slave" or next best to give food on a day of famine. (90:13–14) There are wrongs, as seen by the Qur'ān, for which the prescribed expiations are freeing slaves. If the wrongdoer has none, let him buy one and manumit him. If that is also impossible, either because there are no slaves or if the sinner does not have the means, there are substitute deeds of repentance. For instance, he who says something unlawful to his wife should repent thus:

> And those who put away their wives by calling them (like) their mothers then go back on that which they said must free a slave before they co-touch.
> To this you are exhorted, and Allāh is Aware of what you do.
> But he who has not the means should fast for two consecutive months before they touch one another and he who is unable to do so should feed sixty needy ones.
> That is in order that you may have faith in Allāh and His messenger.
> And these are Allāh's limits; and for the disbelievers is a painful chastisement. (58:3–4)

He who uses the name of God in a deliberate oath then breaks it should free a slave (5:89), while he who happens to kill a fellow believer by mistake should free a believing slave and deliver blood money to the family of the deceased (4:92).

> And a believer would not kill a believer except by mistake. And he who kills a believer by mistake should free a believing slave and blood money should be handed to his people unless they remit it as alms... but he who has not the means should fast for two consecutive months, as a penance from Allāh, and Allāh is ever Knowing, Wise. (4:92)

In sharp contrast to submitting slaves to questioning and execution vicariously for their masters, the Qur'ān declares, "not a soul shall bear the burden of another soul" (17:15). There shall be no distinction between slave and master, no discrimination among races, all humans are the children of Adam, and Adam was created from dust; there shall be no excellence for any one except through piety (49:13).

It is thus evident that Islam is the only religion which taught its followers to be kind and humane in their conduct towards their unfortunate fellow-men who happened to be slaves for one reason or the other. Islam enjoined its followers to emancipate slaves and showed them how. As an example the Qur'ān mentions a couple in the Prophet's time who happened to have very little food — barely enough for themselves — yet they gave it all in hospitality, for the love of Allāh, to a slave, an orphan and a needy person (26: 7–20).

When Muslims used to live according to the teachings of the Qur'ān their conduct towards their bondsmen was humane to the extreme, as hailed by Orientalists.[43] Did not Bilāl, who was an Abyssinian slave, become one of the closest friends of the Prophet? He had the privilege of calling the *adhān* for the prayers, and eventually he became ruler of one of the provinces of the Islamic Empire. History also records that among the dynasties of rulers of Egypt and India in the Middle Ages is to be found that of the Mamlouks. These were originally slaves who joined the army and ultimately rose to positions of great power and influence among the elite in society.

Conclusion

The verses rendered above under the different headings are not the only ones related to ethics. How could they be when the Qur'ān is the divine message for man to guide him in his life on earth? There are many more verses which lead man along the straight path under a variety of circumstances. For instance, there is the advice for humility (31:18–19); patience (2:153); gentleness (17:37); refinement of speech (31:17); returning good for evil (12:22); truthfulness (3:17); fidelity (39:2); sympathy for poverty and misfortune (4:135); and care for orphans (4:2) among many other transcendent ethics. Even giving counsel in private is included; let it be a counsel of goodness and grace and not of sin or transgression (85:9).

Among the more delicate points of etiquette to which the Book has drawn attention is that of greeting and seeking permission when visiting each other:

> Enter not houses other than your own until you have sought permission and saluted those in them. (24:27)

> And if you enter houses salute each other a greeting of blessing from Allāh. (24:61)

> And enter the houses through the proper doors, (not from the back). (2:189)

When you eat or drink remember it is God who has provided for you (5:4). When a greeting is offered you return it with a more courteous greeting or at least of equal courtesy, as Allāh takes account of all things (4:86).

If you intercede in a good cause to help someone in need, you will be rewarded by God (4:85). Do not ridicule others who may be better than you, whether you be men or women; neither defame nor be sarcastic to each other; do not call others by offensive nicknames; avoid suspicion, spying on each other and speaking ill behind each others' backs (49:10–12).

> Help each other in righteousness and piety, but not in sin and transgression, and fear Allāh for Allāh is strict in punishment. (5:3)

An integral part of the community's life is the relationship be-

tween tribes or nations; there are treaties to be ratified or wars which inevitably break out between countries. None of these is overlooked in the Qur'ānic teachings; the theme under all conditions is piety and equity. In the transactions either between nations or between men, justice and fairness should prevail:

> Surely Allāh commands you to make over trusts to those entitled to them, and that when you judge between people judge with equity.
> Surely Allāh admonishes you with what is excellent,
> Surely Allāh is ever Hearing, Seeing. (4:58)

At times of war and even on the battlefield, the Muslim fighters are commanded to be firm and steadfast but not to transgress, and always to remember Allāh and to exericse piety (9:123).

> And fight in the way of Allāh against those who fight you but do not transgress; surely Allāh does not love the transgressors. (2:190)

All these transcendent and comprehensive norms of conduct have been the object of great admiration from a few scholars.[44] No wonder, because they were established long before etiquette and codes of chivalry were known in the East or West. Reflecting on the verses rendered above, one wonders whether there could be any comparable man-made code of morality. One is also obliged to ask how all these verses could be overlooked by those Orientalists who accused the Qur'ān and Islam either of being devoid of ethics or of sanctioning wrongdoing.[45] How could those fairly recent scholars specifically dismiss the Qur'ān as containing nothing about respect for parents, property or life, or about the avoidance of bearing false witness?[46] Was it lack of care while reading the Book? Was it lack of understanding? Or was it simply blind prejudice? Despite all this carping criticism, the Qur'ān remains an ideal: the inspiration for millions upon millions of believers to guide them in every aspect of their lives.

Chapter 13

Predestination and Free Will

Does man have an absolutely free will to set his course in life and to reach the goals he aims at or hopes for? Or is his course determined for him by a greater power over which he has no control nor any say? Granted, no one has ever predetermined the time, place or environment of his own birth. It may be argued that although birth is beyond the baby's control it is not so on the part of the parents. How much control do they have? Reflecting on our genes which hand down to us certain aspects of our looks, capacities and characteristics from our ancestors which aspect and which ancestor is under our command? And to what degree?

Of the multitudinous functions operating continuously in the nervous, digestive, respiratory and other systems in our own bodies, how many of them are under our management? And to what extent? No doubt it is up to us to eat or drink, but from the moment the food goes down beyond the palate how much control do we have on the processes which ensue?

It is not the author's belief, nor is it the idea he is trying to put across, that we are simply predestined in every respect; far from it. How many of our thoughts, words and actions are completely ours? How many more of our deeds influence families, friends and others whom we may not even know? No one can deny your freedom to spend your time the way you like, take the job you enjoy if it is available, eat the food you fancy at any time you like, say what you wish to whom you please; all this is your own responsibility.

It is thus evident that the subject of predestination and free will cannot be illustrated in black and white as some people think. The roles of any person in life when looked at in perspective are no doubt manifold. Some of man's actions are under his free will whereas certain others are, to say the least, outside his full control.

Many thinkers and writers have subscribed to endless discussion on the subject of free will since the ancient times, no matter whether their background was Muslim, Christian, atheist or otherwise. Each has claimed to have reached the final irrevocable solution for the controversy, only to be followed by others who disagree outright with his ideas and start anew.

It is not the author's intention, nor should it be, to discuss the different views proclaimed by the various writers, ancient and modern, because this would extend far beyond the scope of the present chapter. Instead, attention will be focussed on what the Qur'ān says about this matter and what the Orientalists' comments are. Reading through the literature, one finds diverse views taken by Western scholars. The differences are not among their own ideas but among what they infer the Qur'ān to have said. With a subject so complex, one can easily find an excuse for the discrepancies among Orientalists; but what is the truth?

Does the Qur'ān preach fatalism?

This has been the impression given to millions in the West by the attitude of several Muslim individuals and communities they have seen or heard about. Their resignation to their fate (*maktūb* or *kismet*) and the little or no effort they make to improve their conditions, their refusal to seek medication when sick — such behaviour has been reported and known to many. A case in point is that of some primitive mothers in the Egyptian countryside who were noted by Rhoda Amine to care inadequately for their children's health.[1] In fact the germ of their fatalism lay in their ignorance and definitely not in their religion of which the first instruction ever revealed is the dynamic quickening "read". (96:1) As one of the arguers for this point, Daniel observed that in the seventeenth century, a period of their steepest decline, Muslims used to make

little or no effort against a plague by taking precautions, whereas in the Middle Ages, when they were closer to their religion, the pattern of utter resignation was entirely absent.[2]

The behaviour of people can be quite different from what their faith teaches. So, what does the Qur'ān actually say? On the question of predestination Bethman found a great number of passages in the Book which left him in no doubt that man's course of life is mapped out beforehand; nothing can forestall or retard his destiny.[3] To this Sale added that "good and evil are irrevocably fixed, with no possibility of avoidance by any foresight or wisdom".[4] With the same blinkered fierceness Draycott accused Islam of establishing its unassailable belief in fatality: "Not even fatalism of cause and effect bearing within itself the essence of a reason too vast for humanity to comprehend, but the fatality of an omnipotent and capricious power wherein mankind can alter no tiniest detail of his destined lot."[5] To the same school belonged von Grunebaum who inferred from verses like the following, a sapping of the roots of free will which renders man "blind to the teachings of the past, apathetic in the present and indifferent to the future".[6]

> To Allāh belongs whatever is in the Heavens and whatever is in the earth,
> He forgives whom He pleases and chastises whom
> He pleases, and Allāh is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful. (3:129)

Bethman wrongly claimed this to show that Islam inhibited all moral initiative, all striving to achieve higher goals, all endeavours to improve character. He could see no room for personal responsibility for success or failure. The mistaken impressions of these Orientalists will be discussed in the coming pages.

Diametrically opposed to these views were the interpolations made by Lammens and Watt. They observed many verses where it is made clear that "God's guidance and leading astray follow upon man's acts of belief and righteousness or disbelief and wickedness"[7]. "There is much fatalism," Watt added, "among those who are Muslim; but in the essential Islam of the Qur'ān fatalism is strenuously opposed, even though frequent expression is given to the truly religious sense of dependence on God for power to act and for protection from evil."[8]

A broader view of the Qur'ān was expressed by Arberry and Landau who explained the relationship between God and man.

"They are agreed that every breath they draw, every glance they cast and every motion they perform is by virtue of a faculty which God originated in them and a capacity which He created for them; no action could be performed without these. They are still accredited with acts and merits in the true sense for which they are rewarded or punished."[9] Allāh issued commands and prohibitions, sent messengers with good tidings and warnings against which people might gauge their work.

Along similar lines Lewis declared that whatever limits might be set to human freedom by divine decree people had freedom enough within these limits to decide their own fate. Far from being a fatalistic religion Islam has been a religion marked by a strong sense of human responsibility for human conduct. It is an individual responsibility; no one can suffer a punishment vicariously.[10] Allāh charges no soul save to its aptitude (2:282). No soul will carry the burden of another (53:38).

Sadly the Qur'ānic views on the subject seem to have proved confusing for Gairdner and Levy who deliberated over the "two voices" of the Qur'ān. Only at times, they exclaimed, is Islam efficacious and constructive, while for the remainder it sinks into dead fatalism.[11]

What the Qur'ān preaches on the theme

On this manifold subject the Qur'ānic teachings cannot be encapsulated in one phrase. In order to formulate an opinion let us ponder a few typical verses quoted often by writers on this controversial topic. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 10, Allāh the Almighty, the All-knowing, created, controls and maintains the universe. He created everything with a perfect design and measure (6:73; 14: 32–34).

Although numerous natural phenomena are subservient to man, he himself is one of Allāh's creatures. Admittedly he is a favoured one, but, nonetheless, he should not put himself above his proper status:

> Allāh is He Who created you, then He sustains you then He causes you to die, then He brings you to life. (30:40)

When one of the kings thought of himself as a master of everything, he was trimmed down to size by Abraham. Their discussion is vividly narrated in the Qur'ān:

> When Abraham said My Lord is He Who gives life and causes to die, he said: I give life and cause death. Abraham said: Surely Allāh causes the sun to rise from the East, so do thou make it to rise from the West; thus he who disbelieved was confounded. (2:258)

No man can cause the sun to rise from the West, stop the rotation of the earth or prevent the moon from waxing or waning. Any one of these, and multitudinous other natural phenomena, although assigned to serve man, are far beyond both his capacities and responsibilities. All are most definitely within Allāh's domain.

> And We have placed in the earth firm (mountains) lest it quake with them, and We have placed therein ravines as roads that haply they may find their way. (21:31)

Looking at the rendering of this verse one realizes that man has no control on mountains to prevent the earth from quaking, whereas he can and must exert some effort to make use of the ravines and find his way when travelling. Because this effort is within his capacity it is therefore his responsibility.

There is every proof that man is finite and circumscribed in his powers, faculties, range and spectra of his senses, knowledge and, last but not least, life span. Nevertheless, his mental, conscientious and intuitive capacities are adequate for his taking the right decisions in certain situations but he cannot pass balanced judgements on everything. Every man and woman has the ability to discriminate between right and wrong (90:10), and is therefore responsible for taking the proper decision. Man does not live in a vacuum. Before taking any step in his life, he should use his brain and think. An evident axiom is that, with man's limited capacities he needs assistance of various kinds. The greatest help to believers comes from the Omnipotent, Omniscient, Beneficient, Merciful God. He has sent messages for guiding mankind towards the good ways of life (3:164). Because of his superlative mercy, God holds man responsible only after sending him his message of guidance:

> Whosoever is guided, for his own soul is he guided, and whosoever goes astray to its detriment only does he go astray.

> And no bearer of a burden bears the burden of another. Nor do We chastise until We send forth a Messenger. (17:15)

Man is held responsible for the work he does — not for that done by others. His responsibility is limited by the range and degree of his freedom, the scope of work he can do or refrain from doing. The benevolent deeds he achieves are held to his credit, whereas any wrong which he does with full intention, free will and complete control on his wits can only equitably be held against him. If he does not beseech his Lord's forgiveness he should only expect his fair punishment:

> And whoever does evil or wrongs his soul then asks forgiveness of Allāh will find Allāh Forgiving Merciful.
> And whoever commits a sin commits it only against himself. And Allāh is ever Knowing Wise. (4: 110–111)

It is one's work, not wealth or children, which can be held to one's credit (34: 37–38). If one happens to do wrong by mistake, forgetfully or under an outside influence, Allāh the Compassionate offers forgiveness, but only if the sinner asks humbly for repentance (2:286).

On the other hand, if you try to do good but for some external reason cannot accomplish the work, you will still be generously rewarded for your good intentions:

> Whoever goes forth from his home fleeing to Allāh and His Messenger, then death overtakes him, his reward is indeed with Allāh. (4:100)

While the pious, patient and keen doers of good will receive an extremely generous reward, those who are compelled despite their will to do wrong will be graciously forgiven (39: 33–34; 16:106).

The disbelievers who reject Allāh's messages out of their own free will can expect to be held responsible for their actions. Can they disclaim their will power which they have enjoyed ? Or will they contend that their disbelief was their fate, God's will which they could not alter?

> Those who are polytheists will say if Allāh pleased
> we would not have set up naught with Him, nor
> would we have made anything unlawful (6:148)

They would only follow a conjecture and would tell lies which

they realized in their own hearts to be false. They would admit honestly to their own selves that during their lives on earth they have had the free will and ample power to choose and to follow either of the two paths, the right or wrong.

Without any doubt, Allāh, the Just is capable of putting them on the right path, but He gave them the free choice:

> And if Allāh pleased He would certainly have gathered them all to guidance. (6:35)

> And if Allāh pleased He would have made you a single nation but that He might test you in what He granted you. So vie one with another in virtuous deeds. To Allāh you will all return so He will inform you of that wherein you differed. (5:48)

They had the power to choose, and those who out of their own free will chose to disbelieve Allāh's messages have used false logic when they said to the messengers:

> If your Lord had pleased He would have sent down angels. So we are disbelievers in that which you are sent. (41:14)

Instead of paying heed to the message and using their brains to judge its truth for themselves, they chose to deny it outright before even hearing it, and came up with any argument, no matter how irrelevant, such as to demand that God's message should be delivered by angels. This persistent, arrogant denial of the truth would justifiably qualify them for divine chastisement. In the Hereafter they would say;

> Had we but listened or pondered, we would not have been among the inmates of the burning Fire. (67:10)

Those who close their minds to the message and blindly follow the wrong traditions of their ancestors may end up as atheists or polytheists and in their fatalistic submission declare:

> Had the Benevolent pleased, we would not have worshipped them (the partners we imagined). They have no knowledge of this; they only lie. Or have we given them a Book aforetime to which they hold fast? Nay, they say: We have found our fathers on a course and surely we are guided by their footsteps. (43: 20–22)

Islam does not let man wander from the right path and then blame his fate. Had this been the case, Allāh's commandments, his

messages, scriptures and the promise of reward and punishment would all have been void, and impossible to reconcile with the Almighty's wisdom and justice.[12] Those who try to explain away their disbelief or misconduct through the workings of fate and who try to deny responsibility for their evil doing are repeatedly condemned in the Qur'ān:

> And when they commit an indecency they say: We found our fathers doing this and Allāh has enjoined it on us. Say: Surely Allāh enjoins not indecency. Do you say of Allāh what you know not? Say My Lord enjoins Justice; and set your whole selves (towards Him) at every prayer and call on Him being sincere to Him in obedience, as He brought you into being so shall you return.
> A party has He guided, and another party perdition is justly their due. Surely they took the devils for patrons instead of Allāh and they think that they are rightly guided. (7: 29–30)

> Yet, those who have used the faculties Allāh has granted them, have seen the light and followed the path of righteousness have indeed qualified themselves for Allāh's mercy and rewards (7:42).

> And they say: Praise is due to Allāh Who guided us to this; and we would not have found the way if Allāh had not guided us. Certainly the messengers of our Lord brought the truth.
> And they are called: That is the garden you were made to inherit for what you have been working. (7:43)

Does this sound fatalistic? Is not divine guidance absolutely essential for finding the right way? For who else is more expert and a better guide than God? We should not forget the fact that Allāh's guidance is available for everyone, man and woman. And only a minor effort is needed from the person concerned to tap this. The faithful do not claim full credit for their good work because they realize that the divine grace, besides His guidance, includes the faculties He created in them and the resources He made available to them. (16:78)

Those Orientalists such as Bethman and Von Grunebaum who assumed the Qur'ān to preach fatalism were confused by the following verse:

> And certainly We have created for Hell many of the Jinn and of mankind, . . . (7:179)

As if they have not heard the rest of this verse describing those Jinn and men:

> . . . They have hearts wherewith they understand not, and they have eyes wherewith they see not, and they have ears wherewith they hear not.
> They are as cattle; they are even more astray.
> These are the heedless ones. (7:179)

The disbelievers have not sought Allāh's guidance nor have they used the faculties he has granted them. As they did not take advantage of their intellects, they were worse than the creatures which had none, namely the cattle. Can they deny that they had ample power and freedom to see, hear and study Allāh's signs? Did they not willfully refrain from doing so?

An additional support for their same misconception was sought by Bethman and his colleagues in the verse (3:129) rendered earlier.

When they read that Allāh forgives whom he pleases these Orientalists are knocked off balance, causing them to come up with blasphemous accusations such as that God is a "capricious power not bound by the moral law, in no way obliged to give man right guidance or to reward or punish him according to his work".[13] But, with rational, clear thinking, this verse should be read together with many others in the same Book. As an example:

> Verily Allāh does not wrong the weight of an atom; and if it is a good deed He multiplies it and gives from Himself a great reward. (4:40)

And if it is an evil deed God forgives the wrongdoer if he pleases, and chastises if he pleases. If He forgives, surely He is Compassionate, and Merciful; but if He chastises surely He is just. God imposes the fair punishment earned by the wrongdoer with his own free will and power. So, where are the grounds for the above accusations? As it is well known to Muslim scholars that the Qur'ānic verses explain each other[14], so the verse (3:129) should be read together with:

> And that man can have nothing but what he strived for and that his striving will be seen.
> Then he will be rewarded for it with the fullest reward. And that to thy Lord is the destiny. (53: 39–42)

So, there is no caprice but graciousness and mercy, no terror but comfort and hope, no fatalism but benevolent work and good faith in the Kind, Compassionate, Generous and Just Lord.

The Islamic conception of predestination is that everything, including every individual's nature and behaviour, is fully known to Allāh the Creator, the Omniscient:

> And conceal your word or proclaim it, verily He is Knower of that which is in the breasts.
> Would He not Know what He created, and He is the Knower of subtleties the Aware? (67:13–14)

Allāh does not force man's choice; He guides man who alone works out his salvation by faith and good deeds.

The Qur'ān versus the Prophet's teaching

To the author's knowledge and surprise Watt is the only scholar who imagined the Prophet's Tradition as a "straight even atheistic fatalism" in drastic opposition to the Qur'ān.[15] While the Book is theistic and dominated by a faith which holds that the courses of the world and of human life are controlled by the Righteous, Compassionate Lord, Watt dismissed the Traditions of the Prophet as tending towards atheism. In his words: "The outstanding fact is that human life is controlled and fixed; the controlling forces are mostly thought of as vague, mysterious and impersonal as in the statement [of the Prophet's]: 'what reaches you could not possibly have missed you.'" This, incidentally, is a mistaken translation, as will be shown below.[16] Watt thus ascribed what he wrongly imagined to be atheism in the Prophet's teachings to the old pre-Islamic customs of the Arabs which leaked through to orthodox Islam.

Unfortunately, two mistakes were made by Watt in quoting the above saying of the Prophet: one is that he used the wrong tense, and the other is that he quoted only a part of the whole. That understandably led to his vehement accusation against the Prophet's teachings. For a rational appraisal one should at least

quote the whole of the Prophet's utterance on this issue. It was offered as a piece of advice to his young cousin 'Abdullah-ibn-'Abbās. He said:

> O boy; I teach you some words; cherish Allāh and He will cherish you. Cherish Allāh you find Him always. Seek to get near Allāh at times of ease (by thanking Him), and He will be near you at times of hardship.
> If you ask, ask Allāh, and if you seek any help, seek Allāh's help. Realize that if the nation gets together in order to bring you harm they will not be able to except by Allāh's leave; and if they congregate to bring you benefit they will not be able except by Allāh's decree.
> Realize that what has reached you would not have missed you; and what missed you was not aimed at you. And know that success comes with patience, that relief comes with affliction and that with hardship is ease.[17]

Now, where in this Tradition did Watt discern atheism or fatalism? And where did he perceive a contrast with the Qur'ānic teachings? For the Book says:

> And if Allāh touches you with affliction there is none to remove it but He; and if He intends good to you there is none to repel His grace. He brings it to whom He pleases of His servants, and He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. (10:107)

And when the spirits of the Prophet himself were at their lowest ebb, did he not receive this revelation?

> Verily with the hardship comes ease;
> With the difficulty is surely ease.
> So when you are finished work hard,
> and to your Lord be devoted. (94:5–8)

Rather than preaching fatalism or atheism, the above advice of the Prophet's to his cousin displays optimism, immaculate monotheism, courage, perseverence and above all a strong faith in Allāh, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

The faithful Muslim finds fatalism in neither the Qur'ān nor the Traditions of the Prophet. The Prophet was quoted to have said that man, by his sins, deprives himself from some of Allāh's provision.[18] This teaching is in harmony with the verses rendered:

> Is it not clear to those who inherit the earth after its (former) residents that if We please We would afflict them for their sins. (7:100)

> And thy Lord would not destroy the towns unjustly while their people are good doers. (11:117)

Among the Qur'ānic and the Prophet's teachings it is said that one's regret and repentance for one's wrong improves one's conditions in this world and the next.
For instance:

> Ask forgiveness of your Lord, surely He is ever Forgiving. He will send down upon you rain pouring in abundance, and help you with wealth and sons, and provide for you gardens and provide for you rivers. (71:10–12)

The Prophet was quoted by Ibn-'Abbās to have said that whoever supplicated for Allāh's forgiveness, would be granted relief from every agony and good which he might not expect.[19] However, the Prophet did condemn the fatalist attitude shown by some idle Muslims in his time who did nothing but claim to have good trust in Allāh.

Reading the Qur'ān and the Traditions of the Prophet, and understanding their phraseology one easily discerns the complete harmony existing between both of their teachings. No wonder the Qur'ān repeatedly enjoins the believers to "Obey Allāh and His messenger" (8:20), and to "Believe in Allāh and in His messenger" (7:158). Had there been a contrast or a discrepancy between the Traditions and the Revelations there would have been no point in such injunctions. If the contrast Watt imagined had been true, obedience to the Prophet would have meant *ipso facto* disobedience to the Qur'ān. And how could the sources of divine power from outside this world referred to by the Prophet sound anything but mysterious to Watt and others?

The only explanation which may be offered for Watt's misconception is that he, perhaps understandably, could neither have covered the whole volume of the Prophet's Traditions nor could he have achieved a comprehensive grasp of the Qur'ānic views on such a manifold subject.

Conclusion

Man can rightly be described as a member of a community, a descendant and an ancestor of generations, a link in a long chain and a creature in a universe. His will can no doubt be stated as free, but his freedom can never be claimed as absolute in all respects nor extending beyond time and space. The freedom is naturally bounded by certain limits.

This fact should by no means be a source of shame, disgrace or anxiety, for the simple reason that the range of man's freedom is amply proportionate to the scope of his mental and physical capacities which, although being sometimes a source of pride, are inevitably circumscribed.

One should not expect a comprehensive opinion to be defined in black and white on such a manifold subject as free will and predestination. The subject has exercised the minds of untold numbers of thinkers down the centuries. After all, this theme relates not only to man's whole life but to his destiny in the Hereafter as well. The Qur'ān condemns the attitude of fatalism as a misuse of man's intellect and an unjustifiable excuse put forward by wrongdoers for evading their responsibilities. At the same time it cultivates a mature standpoint towards this world and the next, a sense of man being a creature both fully responsible to, and dependent upon, Allāh, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Chapter 14

The Qur'ān and the Metaphysical World

Not all things in existence are perceptible to our senses. There are things in this world which we cannot see, hear, touch or smell, yet they have long been proven to be among the realities we recognize. The more we learn, the more we become aware of the existence of creatures, elements and media which may seem new to us although they have long been there. As an instance, two centuries ago people would not have believed that germs or viruses, electromagnetic waves, or the ionosphere existed. Of course, the scope of knowledge has expanded tremendously in the last few decades, but this expansion has been limited to the physical world.

Information about the metaphysical world cannot be acquired through our senses by physical experimentation. Its source is divine revelation either relayed by prophets or through the inspired flashes of other-worldly perception experienced by saints and mystics. Those who follow other channels in search of knowledge about the metaphysical end up with nothing but mere conjecture.

The supernatural world is much more extensive than our limited material. For instance, in the physical sense man is defined by his body and the phenomena operating within it. Whereas in the metaphysical sense man is not only a mere body, but he possesses a soul, a spirit as well as a heart. This metaphysical heart is not the organ which pumps the blood through the lungs and the rest of the body; it is the centre of passion, love, hate, affection, longing, anger, happiness and sadness.

The spirit (*ar-rouḥ*)

By "spirit" is meant the being which when associated with the body signifies life and which when it departs leaves the body lifeless. The difference between life and death for a person, an animal or a plant is drastic, to say the least, although the physical differences between the body just before and after death may be imperceptible. What caused the vitality of every bodily function to cease? What cut the person off from his immediate surroundings, from the rest of the world? He ceases to see although his eyes remain wide open, he hears no more despite his ears being in as perfect condition as just before. Although his sense nerves and sensorium are still there almost intact, neither touch, prick or blow can he feel.

What is this spirit which is such a well-spring of vitality? Most admit its existence but no one except God knows its substance.

> And they will ask you concerning the spirit,
> say: The spirit is by command of my Lord;
> and of knowledge you have been vouchsafed
> but little. (17:85)

The soul (*an-nafs*) and the heart (*al-qulb*)

As the only thinking being on earth it follows that man alone is entrusted with a sense of responsibility. The state of being aware of his soul and seeking to know its capabilities is an essential step as he embarks on the spiritual path in his search for knowledge of Allāh. Man's physical needs of eating, sleeping, propagating and his other primitive instincts, he shares with the animal kingdom. It is his higher faculties that set him above the brutes. The highest faculty is reason, which enables him to contemplate the Divinity and His attributes.

The brain, the senses and all the physical capabilities of man are the instruments and tools at the disposal of his soul for achieving happiness in this world and the next. Each of man's senses has its respective delights. The eyes' pleasure is in observing the beauties

of nature in scenery and in the faces of persons close to one's heart; the ears' joy is in listening to harmonious sounds and melodies. For he, or she, who seeks knowledge of God the exquisite delight of the soul is in perception of the truth, and its extreme felicity would be in the contemplation of God and being in His presence. A man who lacks interest in the pleasures of his soul is depriving himself of great bliss. It is even worse than eradicating hearing and seeing from his senses.

A person who allows his earthly desires to dominate him and neglects his soul by allowing its faculties to rust, can only be the loser in this world and the next (91:7–10):

> And whoever is blind in this (world to his spiritual needs) he will be blind in the Hereafter and further away from the path. (17:72)

Whereas those who have nourished their souls with faith and righteousness will enjoy serenity and happiness in this world and in the next (72: 13).

The heart, the centre of feeling and passion, was described by al-Ghazāly, the great Muslim mystic, as having a window overlooking the unseen world.[1] The more man purifies himself from carnal passions and concentrates his soul's attention on Allāh's messages and creation, the more conscious of, and responsive to, the spiritual world he will get. His heart will be clearer and more receptive, like a brightly polished mirror brilliantly reflecting the incoming divine light. Evil and wrong cast opacity on the heart and cloud the mirror.

In the words of a contemporary Sufi, as the moon transmits indirectly the light of the sun to the darkness of night, "analogously the heart transmits the light of the spirit to the darkness of the soul. But it is the moonlight that is indirect; the moon itself, when it shines in the night sky, is looking directly at the sun and is itself not in night but in daylight."[2] This symbolism reveals the transcendence of the heart and explains what is meant when it is said that the heart is the faculty of direct spiritual vision. But in fallen man this faculty is veiled. By his acts, man's heart, not his eyes, turns blind (22:46):

> Nay, what they have been earning is rust upon their hearts.
> Nay, surely they are on that Day debarred
> from their Lord. (83: 14–15)

The cure and comfort for the heart lie in remembering Allāh, invoking his name and meditating on his signs:

> Those who believed and whose hearts find tranquility in the remembrance of Allāh,
> Verily in the remembrance of Allāh do hearts find tranquility.
> Those who believe and do good, Joy is for them and bliss (their) journey's end. (13:28–29)

Those who attend to their hearts' perfection will be the felicitous in the Hereafter:

> The Day when wealth and sons avail not (any one) save him who comes unto Allāh with a sound heart. (26:89)

Death — the grave

Each soul has its appointed term in this world ending in death, the homecoming to Allāh, the Creator. With death, the soul loses control over the body which begins to decay. The soul can earn no more, neither good nor bad. It takes the first step into the metaphysical world and starts to perceive its new environment to a degree no more limited by the physical senses of the body. The process of death is depicted in the Qur'ān as taking place gradually throughout the body. The soul becomes detached from the people around it, although its fleshly envelope is physically still in their midst. No one of them can possibly put the soul back into association with the body.

> Why then when it comes up to the throat,
> and you are at that moment looking,
> and We are nearer unto him than you but you see not,
> Why then if you are not in bondage (unto Us)
> Do you not force it back if you are truthful? (56:83–87)

Death is expressed in the Qur'ān as the "Certain Truth", the "True Certainty" (15:99), or the "Return" (96:8). A man or woman is not described as dying but as "receiving" or "having death come to him [or her]", "to be hit by the calamity of death," or "to be fulfilled by death" (2:132; 4:15).

He is the Dominant over His servants;
and He sends guardians over you, until when death comes unto one of you Our Messengers will cause him to fulfill (his term) and they neglect not. (6:61)

According to Islam death is not the end — far from it — it is the beginning of the Hereafter. After death, man clearly perceives the value of his work on this earth, whether good or evil, and he sees the reward or punishment awaiting him.

Resurrection

As one of the basic beliefs of Islam, despite being denied by disbelievers old and new, the theme of resurrection and judgement frequently recurs in the Qur'ān. Logic is persistently employed, as man is invited to ponder and see for himself:

Does not man see that We have created him from a small life-germ, then lo! he is a manifest opponent.
And he strikes out a similitude for Us and has forgotten his own creation.
Says he: Who will revive the bones when they have rotted away?
Say: He will revive them Who brought them into existence at first, and He is verily Knower of every creation.
Who has appointed for you fire from the green tree and behold you kindle from it.
Is not He Who created the heavens and the earth Able to create the like of them?
Aye that He is! and He is the All-Knowing Creator.
For His command when He intends a thing is only that He says unto it: Be, and it is.
Therefore, Glory be to Him in Whose hand is the dominion over all things. Unto Him you will be brought back. (36: 77–83)

Yet the disbelievers of old imagined the resurrection to be impossible once the body had decayed and the bones had turned into dust. Those of today can have much less excuse since the Qur'ānic

truth has now been repeatedly corroborated by scientific evidence. It has been proven that even while alive, some of man's tissues die to be continuously replaced by new ones. His hair falls out to be gradually renewed roughly once every six years.

With death, even if the dead body is cremated, not one atom vanishes by the chemical reactions of burning; it merely becomes combined with other atoms such as those of atmospheric oxygen. In the subsequent reactions in the atmosphere, the soil, plants, animals and others, the atoms exchange affiliations with one another but every individual atom with its ever spinning electrons remains in existence. It is there within the dominion of Allāh and at his command (50:4). He knows where each and every atom is and to what it belongs:

> Not an atom's weight, or less than that or greater, escapeth Him in the heavens or in the earth, but it is in a clear record. (34:3)

After all, are not sleep and waking-up perpetual reminders to us that we shall die and then be brought back to life? "How wonderful is death and his brother sleep!" (Shelley).

It is almost unbelievable to see writers like the Rev. Menezes ridiculing the Qur'ānic teachings about death and resurrection, dubbing them as "the most absurd notions especially when we consider that many people are burnt or devoured by wild beasts."[3] The Reverend Menezes has evidently overlooked the two important passages in the Bible which speak so emphatically of life after death (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2):

> And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall wake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Dan. 12:2)

We also find in Dr Moody's *Life after Life*[4] a contemporary Western affirmation of life after death in the evidence collected from those who had actually been pronounced clinically dead but who returned to testify to the afterlife.

Anyone who denies the life after death may be asked a simple question and be invited to reflect on it. In your previous stage of life, as an embryo in your mother's womb, if you were approached somehow and told that after a certain period of time you would come out and be able to fill your lungs with fresh air, to see various lights and hear various sounds coming from far

away, to eat independently a variety of food, to walk on your own feet, even to travel over distances millions of times the dimensions of the womb you are curled in and to be completely independent of it, would you have believed all these facts then?

Resurrection and gathering of mankind are elaborated on in numerous passages of the Qur'ān (36:49–53; 50:20–29). The day of resurrection shall be extremely long, far longer than days of this world; it shall be thousands of years long (70:1–3). The earth shall be violently shaken, the graves shall be scattered open, the sun, the moon and the stars will no more have their present pattern which is suitable for this world (81:1–3; 82:1–4). A time when the sun shall be folded up, and when the stars shall be dimmed and when the earth shall be shaken with its final earthquake yielding up its burdens. On that day the mountains shall be moved like carded wool, and mankind shall come forth from their graves and be as thickly scattered moths (*Sūrahs* 81, 99, 101). People shall find themselves in an absolutely different environment during this hard and extremely long day. There, friends and relatives shall recognize each other, but everyone shall have terrific apprehensions of his own, sufficient to consume all his thoughts (80:24–27):

> On the day when every soul will find present whatever it has done of good: and that which it has done of evil it would wish there were a long distance separating it.
> And Allāh cautions you against His (retribution); and
> Allāh is Compassionate to the servants. (3:29)

Judgement

The scene is vividly depicted in the Qur'ān:

> And We will gather mankind together and We shall not leave any one of them.
> And they shall be set before thy Lord in distinct order. Now you are come unto Us the same as We created you the first time, but you claimed that We will not perform our promise.
> And the book (wherein everyone's actions are recorded) shall be laid; and you shall see the wicked in great fright of what is (re-

corded) in it, and they say: Doom to us, why does this book omit neither a small action nor a great one.
And what they had done they found present.
And your Lord is never unjust to any one. (18:47–49)

And We will set up a just balance on the day of Resurrection so no soul will be wronged in the least;
and if there be the weight of a grain of a mustard seed We will bring it; and sufficient are We to take account. (21:47)

On that day, the righteous shall be honoured and given their books in their right hands; they shall be called to an easy account and shall turn to their families with joy. But those who have committed wrong in this world without repentance shall be given their books in humiliation; they will wish they had never received their books nor had been raised from the dead. Their riches and power of this world shall be of no avail to them (69:18–29; 84:9–15) On that day, no soul shall be able to give or take any credit from another soul, nor even intercede on its behalf. No parent will be able to avail himself of his son nor will the child be able to avail himself of his parent (31:33).

Every soul will scrutinize what it has achieved in an attempt to assess its destiny; but there will be no friend, no helper, no sympathizer, no patron except Allāh.

Those who disbelieve, even if they had all that is in the earth and the like of it with it, to ransom themselves therewith from the chastisement of the day of Resurrection, it would not be accepted from them; and theirs is a painful chastisement. (5:36)

Even the members of one's body will be evidence and bear witness for or against one's work in this world:

That day We shall seal their mouths, and their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness as to what they earned. (36:65)

And they will say to their skins; Why bear you witness against us? They will say: Allāh Who makes everything speak has made us speak, and He created you at first and to Him you return.
And you did not hide lest your ears and your eyes and your skins should bear witness against you, but you thought that Allāh knew not much of what you did. And that your (evil)

> thought which you entertained about your Lord ruined you so have you become of the lost ones. (41:21–23)

After each soul has received its sentence, the wretched condemned will be herded to Hell, and the rejoicing righteous will be led to Paradise (39:71–75).

Hell-fire

Nowadays it is unfashionable in some circles to believe in Hell, but its existence for Muslims is very real. As depicted in the Qur'ān, it is awful beyond imagination.

> And what will convey to you that which crushes to pieces? (It is) the fire of (the wrath of) Allāh kindled (to a blaze).
> That which leaps (right) over the hearts.
> It shall be closed in on them in columns outstretched. (104:5–9)

> It is the fire, whose fuel is people and rocks which is prepared for the disbelievers. (2:24)

> We have prepared for the disbelievers fire which will hem them in, If they implore relief they will be granted a water like molten brass that will scald their faces. How dreadful the drink and how uncomfortable their abode. (18:29)

> As for those who disbelieve, for them is the fire of Hell; they are not completely destroyed so they would die, nor is its torment lightened for them. Thus We punish every ingrate.
> And they cry for help there; Our Lord, release us, we will do right, not (the wrong) that we used to do.
> Did We not grant you a life long enough for him who reflected to reflect therein?
> And the warner came unto you.
> Now taste, for evil-doers there is no helper. (35:36–37)

Those who deny the Qur'ānic description of Hell may be reminded of the intense heat inside the earth's core, as well as inside the sun where the temperatures reach the order of millions of degrees; these are hard facts for everyone to measure. The faithful believe in the reality of Hell and seek refuge in Allāh's mercy and

guidance so that they may do good and Allāh may accept them into Paradise. This is one of the basic articles of faith in Islam.

Paradise

The abode of felicity is the generous reward for the pious believers from their Lord, the superlatively Just and Generous. Paradise is described in the Qur'ān in the plural, as gardens of unimaginable beauty and delight:

> And those who believe and do good, We shall make them enter gardens in which rivers flow, to abide therein for ever. It is Allāh's promise in truth; and who is more truthful in word than Allāh? (4:122)

> Faces on that day will be happy, glad for their striving. In a lofty garden, wherein you will hear no vain talk. Therein is a fountain flowing, therein are thrones raised high and drinking cups ready placed and cushions set in rows, and carpets spread out. (88:8–16)

> On thrones inwrought, reclining on them facing each other. Round about them will go youths never altering in age, with goblets and ewers and a cup of pure drink. They are not affected with headache thereby nor are they intoxicated.
> And fruits that they choose, and meat of fowl that they desire.
> And pure, beautiful ones, like to hidden pearls.
> A reward for what they have been doing.
> They hear therein neither vain nor sinful talk, but only the saying: Peace! Peace!. (56:15–26)

Paradise represents the pinnacle of happiness and enjoyment and the supreme reward for the believer. But all the varied pleasures will pale into insignificance when compared with the exquisite joy of having pleased God, of being in his presence and being addressed by him (36:58):

> Allāh has promised to the believers, men and women, gardens wherein flow rivers, eternally abiding therein, and goodly dwellings in gardens of Eden;
> and greatest of all is Allāh's goodly pleasure.
> That is the grand achievement. (9:72)

Angels

These are non-physical creatures endowed with life, speech and reason. They neither rest, eat nor propagate. They never disobey Allāh in whatever he commands them. Only He knows their number, has assigned a duty to each and has graded their hierarchy.

> Praise be to Allāh, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, the Maker of the angels messengers with wings two and three and four.
> He increases in creation what He pleases.
> Surely Allāh is Possessor of Power over all things. (35:1)

The wings of angels as described in the Qur'ān are not physical like the feathered wings of birds, because angels are supernatural. Islam categorically disagrees with the practice of depicting them in the form of winged beings, seraphims or infant cherubims as seen on the walls and ceilings of churches and, of course, in paintings. It also absolutely rejects the assumption that angels are feminine as held by some other religions and by the disbelievers of the Prophet's time:

> And they make the angels who are servants of the Beneficent, females; did they witness their creation? (43:19)

Among the duties performed by angels are those celebrating the praise of God (7:206), recording the deeds of every individual (50:18), praying for the believers (32:11), and delivering divine messages of good tidings to them in this world and the next (40:7), and then coming as the harbingers of death.

> Those who say our Lord is Allāh then continue in the right way, the angels descend upon them saying: Fear not, nor be grieved, and receive good tidings of the garden which you were promised. We are your patrons in this world and in the Hereafter and have therein what your souls desire and you have therein what you ask for. A welcoming gift from the Forgiving, the Merciful. (41:50–52)

The archangel who delivered the scriptures to Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad is mentioned in the Qur'ān by the name of Gabriel, and is also referred to as the "Spirit of Holiness", the "Holy Spirit" (6:102), the "Faithful Spirit" (26:193), or "the Spirit" (78:38).

Gabriel is the "Holy Ghost" who delivered the good tidings from Allāh to the Virgin Mary (19:17).

Jinn

These constitute another order of beings normally imperceptible to our senses; they are of both sexes. Those among them who believe used to follow divine revelations of which the Qur'ān is the latest. The disbelieving *Jinn* are devils, "Satans" (Sr. 72). Among the first Jinn was the one named Ibis, or Satan, who disobeyed Allāh's command to pay homage to Adam, and subsequently induced Adam and Eve to commit the sin by eating of the prohibited fruit (2:34–37).

A misconception held by several Orientalists is that Satan was originally an angel before being cast out of Heaven for not paying homage to Adam.[5] The Qur'ānic statement about this problem is crystal clear (18:50). Iblīs was of the Jinn, although the injunction of homage was issued to him as it was to the angels. Other Orientalists reject the concept of Jinn outright as fantasies, the absurdity of which was apparent to "intelligent minds".[6] Had these Orientalists been with us today they would probably have rejected many modern scientific achievements with their same materialistic logic. Certain writers, overlooking the fact that the divine origin of the monotheistic faiths is the same, have confused Jinn with angels, assuming that angels were created out of fire and thus assigned to them corporeal functions.[7]

Conclusion

Belief in the unseen is a fundamental principle of the heavenly faiths. It is the line of distinction drawn between faith and disbelief. It also admits the fact that the universe is infinitely more vast and manifold than what is apparent to sentient man. Those who do not recognize the supernatural as fact may end up rejecting God himself and thus deprive themselves of divine guidance and

grace. This guidance is always available for the faithful and is best illustrated in the verse:

> This is the Book, no doubt about it. A guidance to the pious, who believe in the unseen and perfect their prayers and from what We have provided them they spend. (2:1)

Chapter 15

General Conclusions

The above survey of Orientalists' views on the Qur'ān together with the study of the relevant verses clearly illustrates three salient points. The first is that, with a few exceptions, the opinion generally held in the West about the Qur'ān is hardly realistic. Secondly, numerous Orientalists have unhesitatingly put forward conjectures before studying the sacred Book in detail, and without adequate care or sufficient depth to justify their ostensibly authoritative statements.

The third point is the unanimous agreement among all the writers cited, independent of their diverse backgrounds and beliefs, as to the unquestionable authenticity of the *Muṣ-ḥaf* available to everyone today. Its content and context are the same as the text left by the Prophet Muḥammad to his companions when he died. Not a single *Sūrah*, verse or even a single word has been changed or claimed to have been changed with supporting evidence. The arrangement of the text has also remained the same ever since it was first revealed. However, the difference between their textual and chronological orders has led to confusion on behalf of a few writers who have tried in vain to rearrange the *Sūrahs* according to what each thought to be correct. They came up with diverse results which exacerbated their confusion, overlooking the basic fact that the revelations were never intended to follow one another in the *Muṣ-ḥaf* in a chronological sequence.

The authenticity of the text and its absolute immunity from

even the slightest modulation over such an extensive period of time is surely a miracle which should induce the deepest reflections. The same period has witnessed so many drastic changes in societies, their languages and customs. Some civilizations have flourished while others have faded and decayed. The Muslim world itself is by no means an exception. After its initial tremendous growth in the first few decades of the seventh century into an extensive empire, its ruling centre shifting from Medina, to Damascus, to Baghdad, to Istanbul, many of the provinces developed into satellite states and eventually became completely independent. Most parts of the Muslim world have undergone wave after wave of invaders, foreign occupations and rulers. There are now countless political parties and religious sects. Some communities have severed their ties with the Arabic tongue — the language of the Qur'ān — and started writing in Latin after generations of Arabic calligraphy. Antagonism, strife and even open war have repeatedly flared up between erstwhile brethren in one or the other part of the Muslim world. Despite all this, the *Muṣ-ḥaf* is still there readily available in its unique original text.

The miraculous nature of the Qur'ān is by no means limited to the preservation of its original text over all those centuries. The enchanting literary style, as recognized by linguistic authorities among the born Arabs, is clear, moving and breathtaking, yet, undisputably inimitable. Understandably, this fact can never be appreciated by those Orientalists who have either never read the Book except in translation or read the original text before adequately grasping the language.

The Qur'ānic miracle that is still shining through many screens of translation and can be visualized by non-Arab readers is its subject matter. Having conceded that no translation can do justice to the sublime literary style of the original, the translator, if he is careful, can convey some of the miraculous nature of the ideas promulgated. This is supported by two impressive observations made by specialists in physical sciences.[1] Firstly, there is the complete absence of contradiction between the Qur'ānic statements and established scientific facts; this is in rather striking contrast to other sacred books. The Qur'ān was aptly described by Bucaille when he said, "It does not contain a single statement that is open to criticism from modern science."[2] The other observation is the presence of several Qur'ānic verses which hint at scientific natural phenomena we now see around us. These were never discovered

or even conceived until many centuries after the time of revelation.

These two important observations prove two facts. First, the allegation so often echoed by multitudinous Orientalists that Muḥammad composed the Qur'ān with the assistance of Jewish or Christian sources is categorically false. If that were the case the Qur'ān would not be so immune from flaws and so different from the Bible. Had the Prophet been the author of the Qur'ān yet helped by a Jewish or a Christian source he would naturally have followed biblical lines. What would have induced him, for instance, in his several references to Jesus, to avoid referring to his paternal genealogies, which incidently differ in Matthew's from Luke's Gospel? How could Muḥammad have been aware of the contradictions between the Yahvist and the Sacerdotal texts of the Old Testament and so evade them when narrating to Noah and the Flood? And when describing the Exodus what would have induced him to elaborate on the death of the Pharaoh? He added information about saving the Pharaoh's body from being swept away by the sea and keeping it as a sign for subsequent generations, which information is not to be found in any other scripture. How could Muḥammad have possibly learnt about it all?[3] The other fact to be appreciated is that the Qur'ān could not have been written by any mortal including Muhammad himself, because no man fourteen centuries ago could have been in a position to have known, guessed or conceived the scientific facts clearly understood by the verses as explained in Chapter 2.

The extreme wealth of ideas promulgated, emotions aroused and meanings expressed by the clear yet inimitable style, coupled with the pure undisturbed consistency of the Qur'ān and the complete absence of any contradiction between it and established science put the sublime Qur'ān above all other books. In conclusion, maybe the most appropriate way to describe the Book is to quote it referring to itself:

> *Alif, Lām, Mīm,* that is the Book, no doubt about it, a guidance for the pious who believe in the unseen, keep up prayer and from what We have provided them they spend; and those who believe in what was revealed to you and what was revealed before you and of the hereafter they are certain. These are on a guidance from their Lord and they are those who are felicitous. (2:1–5).

Appendix I

Transliteration of Arabic Words

Every language has its own peculiarities. Among those of Arabic, and relevant to the subject in question, some consonants, the long vowels and the diacritics are to be noted.

THE ARABIC CONSONANTS

Fifteen consonants correspond almost directly to English ones. Hence they need no special transliteration. These are:

Arabic letter	English letter
ba	b
ta	t
jeem	j
dal	d (as in "doubt")
zay	z
sīn	ss (as in "lesson", s in "say" but not s in "rise")
fa	f
kaf	k
lam	l
mīm	m
nūn	n
ha	h (as in "hat")
waw	w
ya	y
ra	r (rolled like the Scottish, not fricative as in southern England).

There are three more Arabic consonants, and the corresponding sound of each is produced by the combination of more than one English letter. These are:

Arabic letter	Transliteration	Sounds like
tha	th	th in "thing"
dhal	dh	th in "this"
shīn	sh	sh in "show"

We should notice that in Arabic, if the ha follows the sīn in a word both letters keep their respective sounds; they never sound like the English

combination **sh**. They would therefore be transliterated with a hyphen separating them.

The remaining consonants in Arabic have no directly corresponding sound in English. They can only be approximated:

Arabic letter	Transliteration	Approximated Sound
hamzah	**'**	a glottal stop, rather like Cockney t in "bottle"
ḥa	**ḥ**	with a sound like an exaggerated stage whisper **ha!**
kha	**kh**	like the Scottish **ch** in "lo**ch**"
ṣaḍ	**ṣ**	as in "**s**alt" but thicker and more accentuated.
ḍaḍ	**ḍ**	thick accentuated **dd** in "odd"
ṭa	**ṭ**	as in "task" but much thicker
ḍha	**ḍh**	differs from the **th** in "**th**is" as the tongue touches the teeth ridge rather than the front teeth
'ain	**'**	differs from the glottal stop. Its sound is produced at the back of the throat similar to that when retching
ghain	**gh**	like the French **r** in "Paris" but rather articulated
qaf	**q**	distinct from the English **q** as it is produced much further back in the throat

In return for these consonants, which are usually so difficult to pronounce for English speaking people, the Arabic alphabet does not contain a **p** or a **v**. The sound of **x** is represented in Arabic by a **kaf** followed by a **sīn**.

Also, there is no letter in Arabic corresponding directly to the **c**. It may be considered by an Arabist as strangely superfluous. When it sounds like a **k** as in "cat" it corresponds to a *kaf*, and when it sounds like an **s** as in "nice" it corresponds to a **sīn**. A somewhat similar argument may apply to the case of **g**. The corresponding Arabic **jīm** sounds like the **j** and **g** in "judge", but not like the **g** in "good". This pronunciation is only an accent in some provinces.

In Arabic, each letter has its particular sound. There is nothing like the **gh** of "thought" or "weight". An Arab would wonder why "rough" is not spelt "ruf".

In Arabic lettering the dots play a very important role. But for the dots, the **ba**, the **ta**, the **nūn**, the **ya**, for instance, would look the same, and the **dal** and the **thal** would look identical.

ARABIC VOWELS

There are short and long vowels. Only the long ones are represented by proper letters:

Arabic letter	Transliteration	Approximated Sound
alif	ā.	prolonged a as in "far" rather drawled
waw	ū	sounds like a prolonged u in "put" or like the oo in "moon"; but not like the o in "ton" or the u in "but"
ya	ī,	sounds like the ee in "deep" as distinct from the i in "dip"

In addition to sounding a long vowel, each of these letters can sound like a diphthong, depending upon the diacritics. Thus, the **waw** can sound like the ou in "shout"; and the **ya** like the i in "wide".

The short vowels are indicated only by diacritics. For instance, the short a (as in "hat"), and the u as in "but" would both be represented by a horizontal dash above the preceding consonant in each case.

The sounds of o as in "hot" and u as in "put" are both represented by the same diacritic. Also, the short i in "pin" and the e as in "pen" are represented by the same diacritic. The same English letters are used in the transliteration in this book.

EXAMPLES

Fo'ād. with its glottal stop and prolonged ā it should sound quite distinct from *foad* or "food".

Ḥassan with the articulation of the Arabic ḥ and the hissing sīn it is not the same as say *hasan*.

Ṣalāt with the thick whistling ṣaḍ and the prolonged ā it sounds quite different from *salat*, which would be close to "salad".

Walīd should sound like *waleed* rather than *walid* or "wallet".

Appendix II

Order of the Qur'ānic *Sūrahs*

No. in the Muṣ-ḥaf	*Sūrah Title*	*Correct Chrono-logical Order*	*Arrangement suggested by*			
			Rodwell	*Jeffery*	*Muir*	*Nöldeke*
1	The Opener	5	8	—	6	48
2	The Heifer	87	91	54	uncertain	91
3	The Imran Family	89	97	—	2–10 A.H.	97
4	Women	92	100	59	uncertain	100
5	The Table	112	114	60	6–10 A.H.	114
6	The Cattle	55	89	—	81	89
7	The Peaks	39	87	—	91	87
8	The Spoils	88	95	—	2 A.H.	95
9	Repentance	113	113	—	The last (114)	113
10	Jonah	51	84	—	79	84
11	Hūd	52	75	—	78	75
12	Joseph	53	77	49	77	77
13	Thunder	96	90	—	89	90
14	Abraham	72	76	—	80	76
15	The Ḥijr Valley	54	57	40	62	57
16	The Bees	70	73	46	88	73
17	The Night Journey	50	67	44	87	67
18	The Cave	69	69	41	69	69
19	Mary	44	58	50	68	58
20	Ṭa Ha	45	55	39	75	55
21	The Prophets	73	65	—	86	65
22	Pilgrimage	103	107	—	85	107
23	The Believers	74	64	—	84	64
24	The Light	102	105	—	5 A.H.	105
25	The Criterion	42	66	—	74	66
26	The Poets	47	56	38	61	56
27	The Ants	48	68	—	70	68
28	The Stories	49	79	—	83	79

No. in the Muṣ-ḥaf	*Sūrah Title*	*Correct Chronological Order*	*Arrangement suggested by*			
			Rodwell	*Jeffery*	*Muir*	*Nöldeke*
29	The Spider	85	81	—	90	81
30	The Romans	84	74	47	60	74
31	Luqman	57	82	48	50	82
32	Prostration	75	70	45	44	70
33	The Allies	90	103	—	uncertain	103
34	Shiba	58	85	—	49	85
35	The Angels	43	86	—	66	86
36	Ya Sīn	41	60	42	67	60
37	The Rangers	56	50	37	59	50
38	Ṣad	38	59	—	73	59
39	The Throngs	59	80	—	45	80
40	Forgiver	60	78	—	72	78
41	Elucidated	61	71	—	53	71
42	Counsel	62	83	—	71	83
43	Ornaments	63	61	—	76	61
44	Smoke	64	53	—	58	53
45	Cowering	65	72	—	57	72
46	The Dunes	66	88	—	64	88
47	Muḥammad	95	96	—	uncertain	96
48	Victory	111	108	53	6 A.H.	108
49	The Inner Apartments	106	112	—	uncertain	112
50	Qaf	34	54	—	56	54
51	The Blowing Winds	67	43	—	63	39
52	Mount Sinai	76	44	—	55	40
53	The Star	23	46	25	43	28
54	The Moon	37	49	36	48	49
55	The Compassionate	97	48	—	40	43
56	The Inevitable	46	45	—	41	41
57	Iron	94	99	—	uncertain	99
58	She Who Argued	105	106	—	uncertain	106
59	The Crowding	101	102	—	4 A.H.	102
60	The Tested	91	110	—	7 A.H.	110
61	The Column	109	98	—	uncertain	98
62	Friday	110	94	—	uncertain	94
63	The Hypocrites	104	104	—	65 A.H.	104
64	Requital	108	93	52	82	93
65	Divorce	99	101	—	uncertain	101
66	Prohibition	107	109	—	1–8 A.H.	109
67	Kingship	77	63	—	42	63
68	The Pen	2	17	15	52	18
69	The Indubitable	78	42	—	51	38

No. in the Muṣ-ḥaf	*Sūrah Title*	*Correct Chronological Order*	*Arrangement suggested by*			
			Rodwell	*Jeffery*	*Muir*	*Nöldeke*
70	The Ways of Ascent	79	47	—	37	42
71	Noah	71	51	43	54	51
72	The Jinn	40	62	—	65	62
73	The Unwrapped	3	3	20	46	23
74	The Cloaked	4	2	2	21	2
75	Resurrection	31	40	33	36	36
76	Man	98	52	—	35	52
77	The Wended Winds	33	36	29	34	32
78	The Tiding	80	37	30	33	33
79	The Snatchers	81	35	28	47	31
80	He Frowned	24	24	14	26	17
81	The Folding	7	32	24	27	27
82	Disintegration	82	31	23	11	26
83	The Cheaters	86	41	—	32	37
84	The Splitting	83	33	26	28	29
85	The Constellations	27	28	19	31	22
86	The Bright Star	36	22	12	29	15
87	The Most High	8	25	16	23	19
88	The Overwhelming	68	38	31	25	34
89	Dawn	10	39	32	14	35
90	Hometown	35	18	8	15	11
91	The Sun	26	23	13	4	16
92	The Night	9	16	7	12	10
93	The Forenoon	11	4	10	16	13
94	Delight	12	5	9	17	12
95	The Fig	28	26	17	8	20
96	The Clot	1	1	1	19	1
97	Power	25	92	11	24	14
98	The Evidence	100	21	51	uncertain	92
99	The Quake	93	30	22	3	25
100	The Runners	14	34	27	2	30
101	The Shocker	30	29	21	7	24
102	Hoarding	16	15	57	9	8
103	The Afternoon	13	27	18	1	21
104	The Traducers	32	13	5	10	6
105	The Elephant	19	19	6	13	9
106	Quraish	29	20	3	5	4
107	Charity	17	14	58	39	7
108	Bounty	15	9	4	18	5

No. in the Muṣ-ḥaf	*Sūrah Title*	*Correct Chronological Order*	*Arrangement suggested by*			
			Rodwell	*Jeffery*	*Muir*	*Nöldeke*
109	The Disbelievers	18	12	34	38	45
110	Support	114	111	56	30	111
111	Thorny Fibers	6	11	55	22	3
112	Absoluteness	22	10	35	20	44
113	Daybreak	20	6	61	uncertain	46
114	Mankind	21	7	62	uncertain	47

Appendix III

Sūrahs revealed partly in Mecca and partly in Medina

Textual order	*Title of Sūrah*	*Number of verses*	*Revealed in*	*Except verses numbered*	*Revealed in*
2	The Heifer	286	Medina	(281)	Mina near Mecca
5	The Table	120	Medina	(3)	'Arafāt near Mecca
6	The Cattle	165	Mecca	(20,23,91, 93,114,141, 151,152,153)	Medina
7	The Peaks	206	Mecca	(163–170)	Medina
8	The Spoils	75	Medina	(30–36)	Mecca
9	Repentance	129	Medina	(128,129)	Mecca
10	Jonah	109	Mecca	(40,94,95, 96)	Medina
11	Hūd	123	Mecca	(12,17,114)	Medina
12	Joseph	111	Mecca	(1,2,3,7)	Medina
14	Abraham	52	Mecca	(28,29)	Medina
16	The Bees	128	Mecca	(126,127, 128)	Medina
17	The Night Journey	111	Mecca	(26,32,33, 57,73–80)	Medina
18	The Cave	110	Mecca	(38,83–101)	Medina
19	Mary	98	Mecca	(58,71)	Medina
20	Ṭa Ha	135	Mecca	(130,131)	Medina
22	Pilgrimage	78	Medina	(52–55)	Between Mecca and Medina
25	The Criterion	77	Mecca	(68–70)	Medina
26	The Poets	227	Mecca	(197, 224–227)	Medina
28	The Stories	88	Mecca	(52–55)	Medina
				(85)	During migration from Mecca to Medina
29	The Spider	69	Mecca	(1–11)	Medina
30	The Romans	60	Mecca	(17)	Medina

Textual order	*Title of Sūrah*	*Number of verses*	*Revealed in*	*Except verses numbered*	*Revealed in*
31	Luqman	34	Mecca	(27–29)	Medina
32	Prostration	30	Mecca	(16–20)	Medina
34	Shiba	54	Mecca	(6)	Medina
36	Ya Sīn	83	Mecca	(45)	Medina
40	Forgiver	85	Mecca	(56,57)	Medina
42	Counsel	53	Mecca	(23,24,25, 27)	Medina
43	Ornaments	89	Mecca	(54)	Medina
45	Cowering	37	Mecca	(14)	Medina
46	The Dunes	35	Mecca	(10,15,35)	Medina
47	Muḥammad	38	Medina	(13)	During migration from Mecca to Medina
53	The Star	62	Mecca	(32)	Medina
56	The Inevitable	96	Mecca	(81,82)	Medina
68	The Pen	52	Mecca	(17–33 and 48–50)	Medina
73	Unwrapped	20	Mecca	(10,11,20)	Medina
77	The Wended Winds	50	Mecca	(48)	Medina

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4 Kritzeck, p. 33
5 Arberry, (i)
6 Ibid
7 Galalud-Dīn As-Sayouty, p. 117
8 Al Qorṭoby, Vol. i p. 4
9 Arnold and Guillaume, p. ix

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3 Bucaille
4 Caiger
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6 Ibid, p. 9
7 Parrinder, p. 45
8 *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* Vol. 3 pp. 374–390
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13 Menezes, p. 158; Draycott, p. 335
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18 Daniel
19 Rodinson (ii), p. 77
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25 Ibid, p. 36
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27 Sale

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30 Zwemer (i), p. 12
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32 Menezes, p. 161; Gardner
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34 Anderson, p. 57
35 Rodinson (ii), p. 88
36 Bell (i) p. 70
37 Rodwell; Jeffery (ii)
38 Jeffery (ii), p. 14

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4 Draz
5 Palmer; Jeffery (ii), p. 20;
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